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# Cattle theft in Christol Cave. A critical history of a rock image in South Africa.



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A new revised and expanded edition.  
Translated by Paul Bahn.



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**Traces 2015**  
St-Benoist-sur-Mer



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## Introduction

Drawing up thematic inventories, developing regional corpora, interpreting certain types of images, constructing chronologies: these are the common lot of researchers who study rock art. Contrary to what can be observed with other graphic expressions, in this domain there are extremely few monographs devoted to a particular work of art. Where this kind of study is concerned, one can really only cite, for the Palaeolithic, the little booklet by Denis Vialou on the “jumping cow” of Lascaux<sup>1</sup>. A manual for analysis of iconographic documents concludes its chapter devoted to the whole of Franco-Cantabrian parietal art by showing “how delicate it is to interpret figures that cannot have light shed on them by a solid knowledge of their context.”<sup>2</sup> Where the Neolithic is concerned, apart from the analysis of the “frescoes” of Ti-n-Hanakaten (Tassili-n-Ajjer, Algeria) by Slimane Hachi, who considers them to be a “mythogram”<sup>3</sup>, there is only the study carried out in 2004 by Augustin Holl of the famous assemblage of “Dr. Khen’s shelter” at Iheren (likewise in the Tassili-n-Ajjer). In this work, the author identified motifs that were grouped into themes which, in their turn, form scenes that make up a particularly complex assemblage, and he proposed a reading of this panel which, even if

not really convincing, nevertheless remains innovative in its initial approach<sup>4</sup>. In South Africa, two undated assemblages have given rise to long interpretative commentaries: the “Linton panel” conserved since 1918 in the South African Museum in Cape Town<sup>5</sup>, and a panel at the site known as “Game Pass Shelter” at Kamberg, which owes to David Lewis-Williams its reputation — whose validity we shall not discuss here — of being nothing less than the “Rosetta Stone” of the rock art of southern Africa<sup>6</sup>.

It is, in part, an approach somewhat comparable to these that we have adopted in this work, since it is entirely devoted to a single rock art layout. But the location, the history and the theme of the panel that we are analysing and interpreting, the numerous commentaries to which it has already given rise, and the use that has been made of it in support of various theories, have all led us to go beyond a simple iconographic analysis and to bring together the tools and expertise of the parietalist, the historian, the ethnologist and even the archaeologist and linguist. In the pages that follow, we finally take the risk — for a single image — of calling on all the knowledge and testimony accumulated over two centuries about the zone where

[1] D. Vialou (2003). And that one is a « children’s book ».

[2] A. Duprat (2007) : 19.

[3] S. Hachi (1999). This term is borrowed from André Leroi-Gourhan.

[4] A. Holl (2004). The author made the mistake of not visiting the site, and he is basing himself on an erroneous recording, which distorts all his conclusions (Le Quellec 2007 : 121).

[5] D. Lewis-Williams (1989).

[6] D. Lewis-Williams (2002 : 251).





it is still possible to see it, even though it has in large part been destroyed. In other words, the analysis that we are going to propose is similar to an iconology — a genre which it would be no exaggeration to say is not currently very popular in rock art studies.

We have not followed the path that has most often been adopted for rock art studies in South Africa, because several objections have been raised which counter the approach that interprets the images with a shamanic key<sup>7</sup>. That procedure assumes *a priori* that the paintings produced by “San” painters reflect *ipso facto* the cosmology of a world of “hunter-gatherers”, whereas a growing number of data show that these terms must not be systematically associated, as we shall see in more detail in the course of this book. Moreover, we do not feel it prudent to adopt a paradigm which generalises to almost all of San rock art a hypothesis for reading it which is built on a small assemblage of figures that are highly localised but which have been deciphered on the basis of data gathered in other regions in the 19th-20th centuries. We are all the keener to avoid it because there is absolutely no certainty that the two assemblages it tries to connect are representative in any way: on the one hand, it is not certain that the images selected to underpin this reading are characteristic of a common artistic tradition that reflects a “pan-San” ideology<sup>8</sup>, and on the other the ethnographic data which are currently available were collected from San groups which had long been in contact with other populations<sup>9</sup>. Resorting to ethnographic documentation from long ago (oral traditions collected by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd from the now-extinct /

Xam group) and far away (ethnographic investigations among the !Kung or Ju/'hoansi of the Kalahari, who have no rock art tradition whatsoever) is usually justified by the fact that the Drakensberg San have supposedly disappeared completely, along with their corpus of knowledge about the production and interpretation of the rock images... which is quite simply untrue<sup>10</sup>. On the contrary, in the Drakensberg there are still descendants of the ancient painters, who both perpetuate and recreate ceremonies at the painted sites which have absolutely nothing to do with what some people consider “shamanism”<sup>11</sup>. Unfortunately, their testimony has been neglected in favour of the interpretations put forward by a whole school of archaeologists<sup>12</sup>. The approach adopted by the latter, linked to a certain idealisation of the San, has helped feed a veritable modern myth: that of the San-hunter-gatherers, free of all external influences, located outside of historical time, and possessors of an authentic original tradition<sup>13</sup>. This paradigm sacrifices historical accuracy, places the chronological dimension into parentheses, and tends to describe prehistoric southern Africa as culturally static, contrary to what has been amply demonstrated by data from archaeology<sup>14</sup>, ethnography and history<sup>15</sup>. The oral texts selected for this reading from those collected by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd from the /Xam have been overinterpreted or mistranslated, especially where healing rituals with trance and dance are concerned — these are, in fact, totally absent among the /Xam — and D. Lewis-Williams has systematically translated as “shamans” the term *!gi:xa* (pl. *!gi:ten*) which in reality designates not only healers but also ancestral spirits who were prayed to as *game*

[7] Riel-Salvatore (2005).

[8] Jolly (1996).

[9] Denbow (1984), Parkinson & Hall (1987), Sadr (1997, 2002: « Encapsulated Bushmen... »).

[10] Ndlovu (2005), Francis (2006).

[11] Derwent & Weinberg (2005), Prins (2009).

[12] Prins (2000).

[13] Wilmsen (1996), Wessels (2008).

[14] Mazel (1989), Phillipson (2005), Barham & Mitchell (2008).

[15] Fauvelle-Aymar (2006: *passim*), Challis (2008), Prins (2009: 195-196), Francis (2009).





*sorcerers* or *rain sorcerers*<sup>16</sup>. As for the neuropsychological premises that were claimed to permit the generalisation of this model beyond cultural differences, they were based on a largely bogus recourse to misunderstood sources<sup>17</sup>.

Even if — nevertheless — a reading using a shamanic key could occasionally enlighten us about certain images in a useful way, and even if the search for a hypothetical cognitive unity rooted in the depths of the central nervous system remains interesting, neither of these approaches has any relevance to the project of this book, which is that of utilising the rock images like historians use archive documents. So we are highlighting an approach that aims to identify the “differences and dynamics in San rock arts.”<sup>18</sup> Moreover, even the adherents of a shamanic-key reading of the rock images of South Africa recognise the limits of their exercise, because numerous decorated panels cannot be deciphered in this way. And that is indeed the case of the site which interests us here, because although one of the rock-art groups in Christol Cave was considered to be a trance scene by Jannie Loubser and Gordon Laurens, the panel nearby, whose study is the subject of this book, has “resisted” the efforts of these interpreters, who have been unable to integrate it into their reading. We do not think it to be a sound method to consider *a priori* that “the ‘battle scenes’ can best be seen as hallucinatory encounters between opposing parties of medicine people”<sup>19</sup>. That is why, instead of seeking similarities that are superficial, atemporal and “pan-San” and even universal, we prefer a study of the spatial organisation of the parietal groups, the examination of the stylistic variations and regional

peculiarities of the images that they contain, and the taking into account of regional ethnographic and historical data.

As associates in this enterprise, the historian, the stone tool expert and the parietalist were not satisfied with combining their practices and juxtaposing their analyses. Since the only worthwhile multidisciplinary work is that which compels its practitioners to go beyond their particular disciplines, the historian, for example, was not afraid to ask questions about the material culture of the Sotho and Nguni populations, the stone tool expert to ask questions about the organisation of the images, and the parietalist to scour the archives in search of some forgotten text. The result is an entirely new reading of one of the rock art assemblages which was thought to be one of the best known in southern Africa, if not the whole of Africa. Which means that it would be worth applying the same approach to other panels on the continent.

As we have already begun to do in this introduction, throughout this book we are going to use ethnic designations such as “Zulu”, “Sotho”, etc. To a certain extent, we have been led to do this because we are thus adopting the usages found in the historical documents that we are using, which are very often the expression of a colonial point of view. Today, fortunately, this viewpoint tends to have been dropped in favour of a critical analysis of the categories of discourse, and replaced by an approach that is far more sensitive to the phenomena of recombination of societies and the forms of expression of belonging to one group or another. For that reason, it is perhaps insufficient to put forward

[16] Bank (2006), Le Quellec (2006: 66), Solomon (2009: 33-34; 2011).

[17] Le Quellec (2005-b: 130-132), Helvenston & Bahn (2002; 2004; 2005; 2006 ; 2007).

[18] Solomon (2008).

[19] Loubser & Laurens (1994: 118).





the excuse that we use these ethnic labels in inverted commas, especially as the inverted commas have often been omitted so as not to crowd the text.

It is well known that precolonial African societies were not the rigid entities that travellers thought they had encountered, that ethnologists believed they had recorded, and which colonial administrators thought it best to endow with an administrative reality, thus completing the “confirmation” of the existence of “ethnic groups” or “peoples” that were clearly delimited and totally separate from their neighbours. This process of “invention” of ethnic groups has been studied in great detail in many regions of Africa. The same applies to South Africa where, for several decades, numerous works have stressed the necessity of “deconstructing” ethnic categories that had apparently become sanctified through being used for several centuries. For example, it is clear that the (nowadays insulting) category of “Hottentot” is the result of a secular history, starting at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, which has more to do with the the European anthropology of “the Other” than with any kind of South African cultural reality<sup>20</sup>. In many cases, however, the ethnic categories are not purely imaginary creations, but constructs produced by a history that served to “freeze” ancient social fluidities, and “fix” the “ethnic group” (or “people” or “race”, etc.) in question in a given space. Here too, numerous works have recently reinforced the idea of a precolonial South Africa with largely heterogeneous societies, subject to spatial and social mobility, to interbreedings, to interactions, to changes in membership by means of intermarriages, for example<sup>21</sup>. Hence-

forth, it is very clear that one needs to be very careful about the categories that one uses in present-day discourse, because they risk conveying a false or partial image of ancient social realities. In particular, we feel that the decisive point here is to recognise that many categories have seen their meaning change over the last two centuries in the history of South Africa, a period for which we have a wide variety of sources available, and the very period during which the essential part of the story that we are going to relate here took place. So we are fully conscious of these precautions, and it is with full knowledge that we will use certain ethnic terms such as Zulu, Sotho or others, fully aware that behind these words there are changing realities that have a history.



[20] Fauvelle-Aymar (2002).

[21] Fauvelle-Aymar (2006 : chap. 1), Carton et al. (2008), Esterhuysen et al. (2008), Landau (2010), Legassick (2010).





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1

## About a battle that took place many times and an image that illustrates all of them

On one side, the assailants, who flee after their crime; on the other, the victims who, having panicked and become disorganised at first, rallied and pursued their aggressors to retrieve their property. Hunter-gatherers have just swooped down on a village of peaceful farmers. They have raided the herds, and are now pushing them forward in great haste, countering the thrown spears of the pursuers with volleys of arrows.

The rest of the story is not told. But nevertheless it is known: whether or not they win this one-day battle against their enemies and manage to seize their animals again, the farmers have already won the war. In this conflict between ways of life and, one might say, between cultures, the hunter-gatherers have lost in advance, condemned as they are by the superiority that seems to be conferred on a society by sedentism, food production, social specialisation, political complexity, and demographic growth.

We know this battle scene very well: it is one of the favourite subjects of 19th-century engravers (**Fig. 1**); one finds it in the pages of prehistory textbooks as well as on the rock walls of Africa or elsewhere. But its evocative force lies elsewhere, in that it mentally “illustrates” a known event:



Fig. 1. Engraving used by Ritchie (1979, p.120), with the following caption: “The Bushmen were inveterate cattle thieves. What they could not carry off they killed. Here, vengeance is at hand as an impi of Zulu or Matabele appear on the horizon.”





the encounter, the the “conflict”, the “clash” of societies at different stages of development, or what will more modestly be called the “contact” between distinct ethnic or racial groups, with economies or lifestyles that are in opposition, or in a transitional phase. Hence there were hunter-gatherers before, and then came the farmer-herders, that is, land clearers whose arable and pasture lands inevitably encroached on the predecessors’ hunting territories. This is what happened at the dawn of the Neolithic, some twelve thousand years ago at its appearance in the Near East, then in the subsequent millennia in Eurasia and Africa; this was then repeated every time when, through conquests or migratory phenomena, neolithised populations “consolidated” their domination by eliminating or absorbing the groups of hunters living in their last pockets of settlement: this is the mytheme of culture being founded by war, of the great transitional war at the dawn of civilisation.

The battle scene that we have just described, characteristic of “contact rock art”<sup>22</sup>, is particularly archetypal and familiar because it seems that “we”, the observers, are the fruit of an evolution that it summarises and illustrates, by painfully reviving in our dreams the nostalgia of a savage past and the tragic feeling of a necessary evolution. The discourse is incarnated on the wall to help us not to imagine but to illustrate or colour an evolution that is felt to be both universal and inescapable.

This type of scene, encountered by chance on the wall of a rock shelter by an explorer in the course of his travels, will therefore stand every chance of being preferred to many others for illustrating the tale of his adventures. Hence,

László de Almásy, the famous discoverer of numerous rock art sites in the Libyan desert<sup>23</sup>, would choose less than a dozen paintings — out of the hundreds he had seen — to illustrate the account of his explorations, but the only image that was presented on a full page in his book was described by him as “battle scene between two tribes one of which wears three feathers in its hair while the other, which is defending its herd, only wears one” (Fig. 2). This choice and the caption are fraught with consequences, since they later formed the basis of the idea of a “general absence of any collective scene of combat before the pastoral age”, as was proposed by Jean Leclant and Paul Huard in a big synthesis devoted to their highly hypothetical “Hunting Culture from the Nile to the Sahara.”<sup>24</sup> The evolutionist nature of such an — unproved — claim suggested that alongside pastoralism there supposedly appeared a covetousness which for the first time in the history of Africa caused fights, wars, raids and other exactions of which the last hunters were suspected, in their jealousy of the new wealth of neighbours who had recently converted to pastoralism.

War, violence and raids were long considered characteristic of the world of hunter-gatherers, particularly that of the San — except during the 1960s, when Elisabeth Marshal Thomas promoted the idea — subsequently disparaged<sup>25</sup> — of the !Kung as “harmless people”<sup>26</sup>. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup>, a global evolutionary view of human societies, which arranged them on a ladder leading from hunters to farmers via herders, placed the latter on a more “civilised” rung than that of the hunter-gatherers, which made it possible to suspect a priori every “Bushman” — the



Fig. 2. Recording of a rock painting at Karkûr Talh in the Jebel el-'Uweynât, Libyan Desert, Egypt. After L. de Almásy (1936: pl. facing p. 32).

[22] This art has been the subject of several specific studies, in the Drakensberg by C. Campbell (1986, 1987), in the Cederberg by L. Mitchell (2002), in the Eastern Cape by S. Hall (1994), in the Caledon valley by J. Loubser & G. Laurens (1994), in the Orange and Caledon valleys by S. Ouzman (2003).

[23] On the exploration of this desert, and on the rock art images found there, see most recently: J.-L. Le Quellec and P. & P. de Flers (2005).

[24] J. Leclant, P. Huard and L. Allard (1980: 524).

[25] Keegan (1993: 120), Goldstein (2001: 29).

[26] E. M. Thomas (1959) whose book was translated into French under the title *Des gens sans méchanceté* (E. M. Thomas, 1961).





archetype of the primitive hunter — of being a thief or an aggressor — moreover this explains their name of “San”<sup>27</sup> (nevertheless this term is often considered more appropriate than its predecessor in post-apartheid South Africa).

On the imaginary ladder of evolution leading inevitably from the “savage” to “civilisation”, war is located on the rung that immediately follows hunting, since it constitutes a redeployment of the latter — a “doublet” as Leroi-Gourhan put it<sup>28</sup> — using the same means, but to other ends. Where the animal world is concerned, hunters were only supposed to know game. Whether they were attacking antelopes or elephants, they were perfect hunters, like generations of anthropologists imagined them. But if some of them attacked their neighbours’ cattle, they became warriors. In an explanatory system like this, the very notion of “hunter-herders” is utterly unthinkable and, seen in this light, the San can only have had a predatory relationship with cattle.

From this viewpoint, the picture of a fight-scene between two groups in the presence of a herd can only be read as a “cattle raid”, and, to the detriment of herders, this can only have been carried out by hunters with long training in tracking, cunning, and of course fighting... namely, in southern Africa, and on the one side, the San.

The image that is supposed to bear witness to this shows the moment of the counter-attack, namely, and at the other side, the justified reaction of the wronged owners, the pursuit of the guilty, the punishment of the theft... in other words, the triumph of civilisation over barbarism. It’s an ill wind that

blows nobody any good, since the savage raid provoked a civilising war. And it was that war which was evoked by Lawrence H. Keeley in his book *War Before Civilization*, and which he illustrates by means of a rock painting (Fig. 3) that gives rise to the following comment:

«The pastoral Khoikhoi (Hottentots) of the Cape region of South Africa at first contact were already fighting with the San (Bushmen) hunter-gatherers, who were raiding their livestock [...] San hunter-gatherers in southeastern Africa fought with the neighbouring Nguni Bantu tribes [...] because of stock-raiding. These San-Nguni conflicts are recorded in prehistoric San rock paintings showing small-statured bowmen without shields (San) fighting large-statured warriors bearing shields, spears, and knobkerries (Nguni). [...] In mountainous Lesotho, relations between the Sotho Bantu and the San were supposedly amiable until Sotho hunting with guns made game scarce and San stock raiding created conflicts. In all these cases, the dynamic behind this farmer-forager warfare was the same: Khoikhoi or Bantu retaliation for San livestock raiding<sup>29</sup>».

The caption which the author wrote to accompany this image is even more interesting, since it describes it as a “Prehistoric rock painting showing battle between San foragers on the left and Bantu farmers on the right”<sup>30</sup>.

This shows the degree to which, in the author’s eyes, this painting illustrated a mythical scene in the proper sense of the word, since it accompanies a real origins story, set in illo tempore because it unfolds “before civilisation”, as is indicated by the book’s title. Even though



Fig. 3. Rock engraving in South Africa used by Lawrence H. Keeley in his book “War before Civilization” (1997).

[27] « San » is a term from the Khoekhoe language (language of the herders of South Africa) meaning « thief, predator ». This hetero-ethnonym, which can be applied just as well to Europeans, was added to the auto-ethnonym « Khoe » (meaning « man, human being » in the language of the stockrearsers, to form the category « Khoisan » which has become of general use in linguistics as in cultural or physical anthropology.

[28] Leroi-Gourhan (1964, II: 237). Pierre Clastres (2005: 17-24, and passim) did a very good job of deconstructing this way of seeing, and highlighted its presuppositions.

[29] L. H. Keeley, 1997 : 123.

[30] L. H. Keeley, 1997 : caption of figure 9.1.





there is no proof that this work is indeed “pre-historic”, it is read, through Keeley’s viewpoint, as a depiction of war between, on the one side, the hunter-gatherers (in this case the San, a priori considered as such) and, on the other, farmers, in accordance with a perspective that places it outside all history, and clearly presents it, in the commentator’s eyes, as the illustration of a primordial combat.

One famous “incarnation” of this original scene — “which depicted [according to the abbé Breuil] a battle between Zulu and Bushmen regarding a herd of cattle stolen by the latter”<sup>[31]</sup> (Fig. 4) — was painted, at an indeterminate date, in a rock shelter in South Africa (Fig. 5). By whom? Hunters, obviously, whose work immortalises a victory one day at the same time as it constitutes their testament: the story of an “encounter”, but an unsuccessful encounter between African “races”, on the left the hunter-gatherers, Bushmen or San, on the right the black farmers, the Bantu. An encounter that stands as an emblem of all the other (unsuccessful) encounters in the history of this country: the Whites too, and in a much more systematic fashion, eradicated the “vermin”, and exterminated the Bushmen from the south of Africa in order to appropriate their lands<sup>[32]</sup>. Moreover, they too are depicted in the paintings in this shelter, where their presence is revealed by the image of an ox-cart, the central object of a folklore raised to mythological status by the Afrikaners, the descendants of 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century European colonists<sup>[33]</sup>.

Who read this testament, this moving evidence from before the end of the massacre? All those who, when visiting the place over a little



Fig. 4. The main panel of Christol Cave at Ventershoek, according to the recording by Dieterlen used by the abbé Breuil (1954: 32).

more than a century, stopped to copy the image will have become its interpreters — missionaries passionate about indigenous culture, professional researchers (including the authors of this article) or those responsible for patrimony. They have all “read” this image, insofar as it can be “read”. Because that is indeed the question: against all appearances, the words that one attaches to the image, the names used to designate the protagonists, the storyline itself are not provided in advance. It requires the authority of the interpreter — an authority conferred by a particular scientific paradigm, a particular ide-

[31] H. Breuil (1954: 32).

[32] N. Penn (1996).

[33] P. Coquerel (1987).





ological environment, the needs of some cause or other — to put this mute image into words and reduce it, in the same breath, to the status of an “illustration”. And yet this image cannot be read immediately; it does not give itself up to the observer like a text. It is necessary to ask questions about how people have looked at it, that is to say, what “we” habitually or readily make it say, in order to grasp if not the meaning, then at least the implication. As we shall see, the present state of the image is such that one can say nothing about with making reference to what has already been said. Consequently, before attempting perhaps, in our turn, to «decipher» the parietal message, at the risk of adding a few useless pages to an already voluminous historiographic “dossier”, let us try to shed light on how gazes and intentions have intersected in the face of this wall.

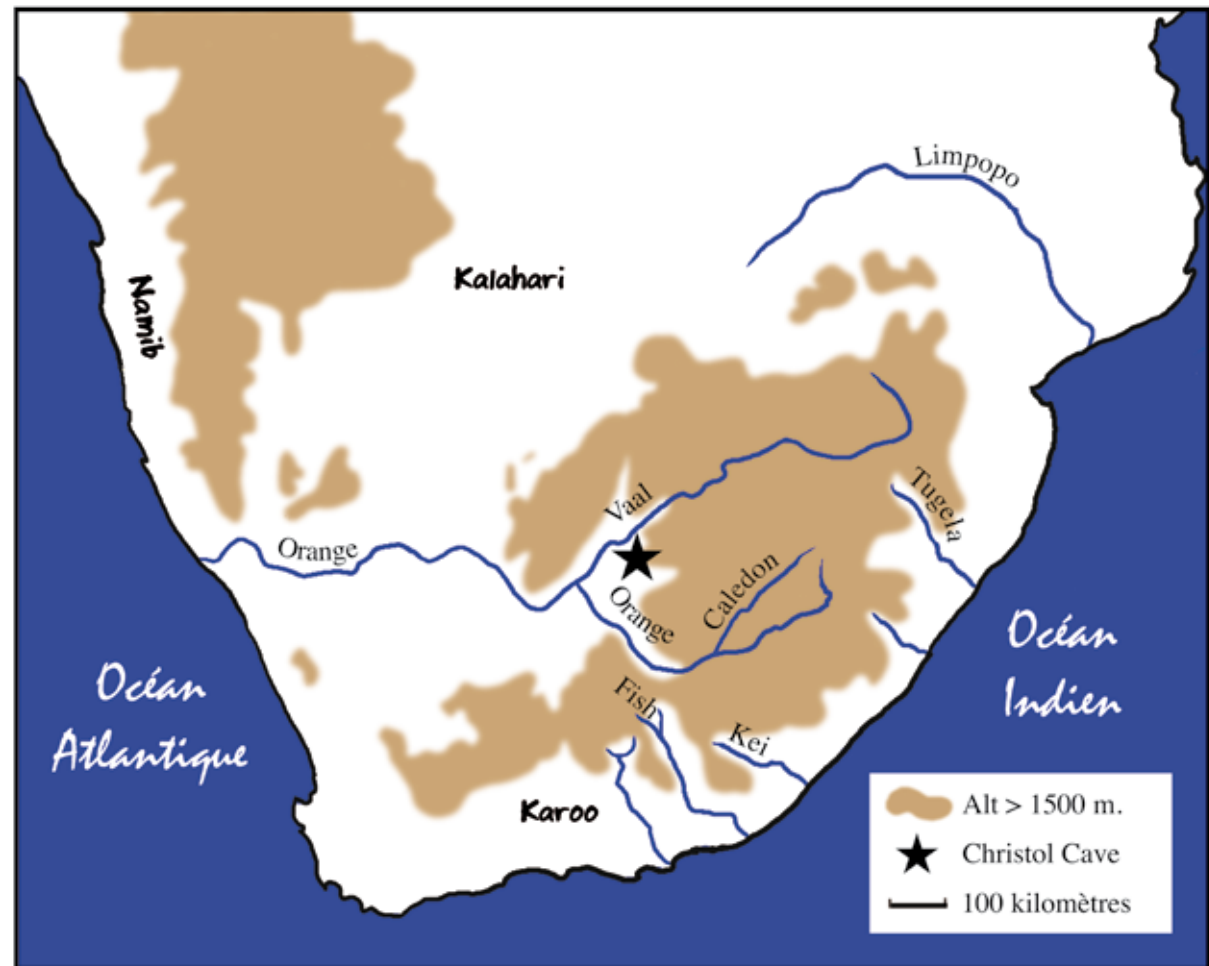


Fig. 5. Location of Christol Cave in southern Africa.  
For a more exact position, see Figs. 13 and 14.





## 2

## The image and its framework

This image has been seen a great deal — Breuil was able to write that it was “reproduced in all ethnographic textbooks”<sup>34</sup> — but not looked at enough. Nor has much been observed about its geographical and historical position. So let’s start there, by gradually stepping back from the wall to see it more clearly in an environment within which it can doubtless be better understood.

The rock painting, as it is seen today<sup>35</sup> (**Fig. 6**), can be described in a succinct way that does not excessively prejudge its real “meaning”: on the left, we see a few bovines, advancing in step towards the left part of the image; on the right, some men. The latter can be clearly divided into two groups: some are painted in reddish-brown; the others, which are bigger, are black. Among the first group — the “cattle thieves” — some are holding a stick in their hand, with which they seem to be spurring on the animals, others are equipped with bows and an oblong implement, a quiver, with arrows sticking out. Opposite, the black men — which some see as running hard towards the left — are carrying spears, with a reserve bundle of them inside broad shields. A close examination of the wall quickly reveals that arrows and spears are flying between the protagonists, and that the whole thing clearly depicts a “battle”.

On the left of the panel, and at upper right, several concave ovals are the stigmata of removals carried out with hammer and chisel, testimony to a “scientific vandalism”<sup>36</sup> to which we shall return below. So let us note that the image is now bereft of numerous elements and somewhat faded over the whole of the surviving surface, both through the effects of natural factors and through the practice of making recordings by direct tracing or through wetting<sup>37</sup>. To aspire today to take a fresh look at it involves first of all taking note of a long tradition of observation of rock art that destroys its subject, like archaeological excavation; it means having to accept to take stock of archives born of other people’s views.

The scene that we have just described succinctly, sanctified by the roughly identical framework of the numerous recordings and photos made in situ for more than a century, is what is generally known as a “panel”. It is by no means easy to define a panel, that is, an assemblage that can be set apart using a series of arguments relative to the composition, style and position of the painting on the wall: where did the painters place the “edge” of their image, the limit beyond which one eventually passes into another image? For want of being able to answer, and accustomed as we are to see only “framed” images



Fig. 6. The main panel of Venter'shoeek, photographed in February 2004 (Photo JLLQ).

[35] Our visits to the site took place on 26-27 April 2003 (F-X F-A, FB & Yann Potin), 29 February and 14 November 2004 (J-L LQ), and 27 April 2006 (F-X F-A & J-L LQ). Our thanks go to the Venter'shoeek farmers for repeatedly authorising and facilitating our visits to their property.

[36] R. G. Bednarik (1990).

[37] Wetting the walls to make rock art images stand out more clearly was standard practice for a long time amongst all researchers with an interest in this domain, especially in Africa, but also on other continents (the case of Spain's Levantine art is a relatively recent example). This technique, which can eventually lead to the pure and simple destruction of the artworks, was practised



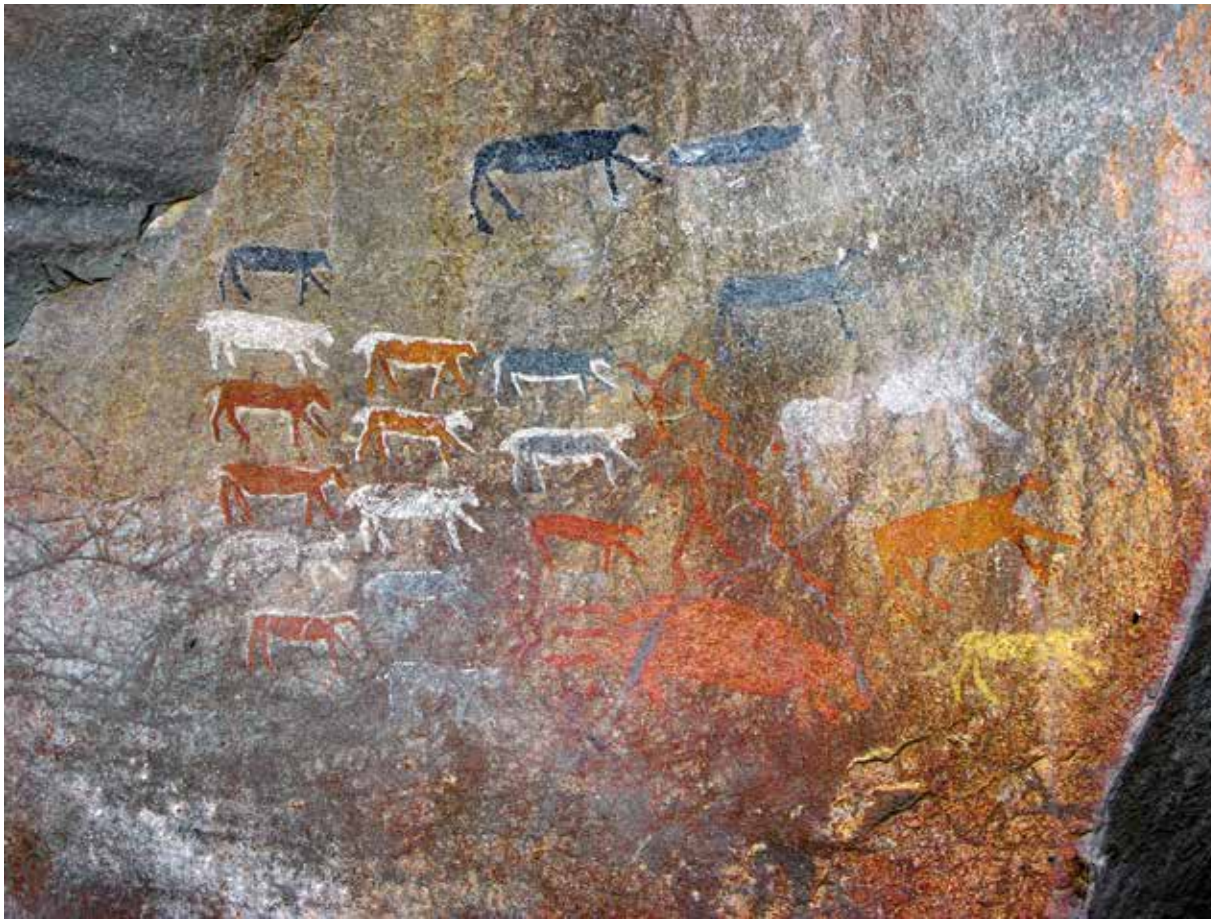


Fig. 7. The other panel of Christol Cave at Ventershoek, photographed in February 2004 (Photo JLLQ).

— from pictures in museums to photographic or cinematographic centring — we often act “as if” the observer’s intuitive framing reproduced the one wanted by the artist. In doing so, we project onto the image, by convenience, a meaning of our own. Our “battle scene”, which unites in the same framework a herd of bovines and to distinct groups of men, one defensive and the other pursuing — that is to say, all the ingredients of a quarrel over cattle — might have dif-

ferent light shed on it if one didn’t make as if to ignore the fact that the scene in question forms part of a line of three shelters containing other paintings<sup>38</sup>. In the one which concerns us, other images are visible<sup>39</sup>, particularly a flock of sheep associated with a feline, a bovine, a snake, an indeterminate large quadruped, four people and a series of fish, the whole thing constituting an assemblage that resists all attempts at an immediate reading (Fig. 7).

systematically in southern Africa by the abbé Breuil and his contemporaries, but it as still being used, alas, in the second half of the 20th century by certain professional researchers. The panel that interests us here was copiously “moistened” in this way, as Breuil himself admitted in his autobiography. The examination of the photographs taken by Clarence van Riet Lowe or by members of the Frobenius expedition and, more recently by Neil Lee in August 1995, shows that they too wetted our panel (as shown by its sparkling appearance and the « freshness » of certain photos, and especially the water flows that are perfectly visible on the images taken with a wide angle).

[38] We have not had the opportunity of carrying out the in-depth study of all of these shelters that we would wish to. But a brief examination did at least allow us to note the presence of rock markings from various periods and cultures. In the rest of the present work, we shall limit ourselves to the analysis and historiography of the main panel, that of the battle scene.

[39] Some were seen by the abbé Breuil, but are no longer recognisable: for example, some “polychrome elands” located on a panel to the left of the “battle scene”, where only some vague red patches can be seen now.





Fig. 8. Finger markings at the base of the main panel of Christol Cave (Computer aided drawing, JLLQ).

Located just a few paces east of the preceding one, this painting seems to us so hermetic that one would hesitate greatly to call it a “scene”, a term that straightaway a certain degree of realism, or at least a certain narrative quality. So this is the first cause for astonishment: in the same shelter, not far apart, there are two painted assemblages, one of which immediately lends itself to a reading by visitors (the “battle scene”) while the other does not. The one has the advantage of a sort of semantic transparency which renders it legible on sight, whereas the other remains perfectly impervious to our understanding. And in this same shelter, other paintings have scarcely attracted the attention of visitors: geometric finger tracings placed beneath the “battle scene”, and similar to what some authors have called the “Late White Tradition”, which is very recent, and generally attributed to Bantu farmers<sup>40</sup> (Fig. 8).

Let us now broaden our view again, to include the whole hill in which our line of shelters is located (Fig. 9). A little lower down to the west is another cavity, decorated with finger tracings in red and white, among which one can recognise a filiform anthropomorph and a few

Fig. 9. General situation of the site, in the lower third of a hill, on Mountain View farm. Two lines of shelters are visible, at two different heights (Photo JLLQ).





quadrupeds some of which are pectiniform<sup>41</sup> but not identifiable, while others, with a thicker body, may evoke domestic livestock (**Fig. 10**). Farther away and lower down the hill, another assemblage associating people with shields and a bovine herd has been the subject of several attempts at removal which have mutilated it for ever (**Fig. 11, 12**).

So let us note this: because of its fame (endorsed by its being classed as South-African historical patrimony<sup>42</sup>), the “panel” of the battle scene has blotted out the site’s other images and the other traces of the past that are visible at the site and in the vicinity. Whatever the name used — Wepener, Christol Cave, Ventershoek, Mountain View Farm, the Jammerberg Cave or even Hermon — it’s always the same site that is being designated, and it is generally the same famous “battle” scene that people have in their heads, otherwise described as a “cattle raid” or an episode of “retaliation” by those who were first attacked and robbed. Polyonymy of the site, polysemy of the image. These expressions, these names do not all say exactly the same thing, revealing that the battle depicted on the wall is in keeping with more general and more ancient conflicts of designation, of belonging, and of territories.



Fig. 10. Paintings in Shelter 1, in the lower line: finger paintings in white and orange, representing pectiniform quadrupeds and a stick-human (Photo JLLQ).

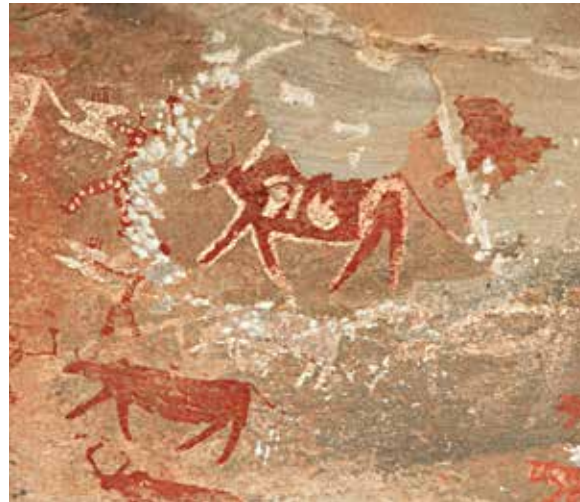


Fig. 11. Attempts to remove paintings from Shelter 2, on the upper line of shelters (Photo JLLQ).

- [41] Term used for extremely schematic animal depictions, in the form of a comb, where a simple horizontal line represents the back, and a series of vertical lines are the legs and tail.
- [42] The site being studied here is one of the twelve “rock art national monuments” scheduled by the “National Monuments Council” (which in 1999 became the “South African Heritage Resources Agency”, SAHRA). The list of “Provincial Heritage Sites [of the Free State]”, established on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2000 (by virtue of new legislation of 1999 making any national historical monument a site registered as patrimony of the province where it is located), provides a longer list of protected sites in the Wepener region (though these are not only rock art sites): “1. Cave containing Rock Paintings 1346 01.09.36; 2. Jammersdrift Battlefield 1824 15.09.78; 3. Robertson-begraafplaas en kerkie 2133 17.10.86; 4. Ou Wabrug oor die Caledonrivier 2226 09.10.87; 5. Rock Shelter and Rock Paintings, farm Ventershoek 1471 13.08.93”. The names are followed by the inventory number and then the date when the site was scheduled ([http://www.sati.web.za/downloads/FreeState\\_heritage\\_sites.doc](http://www.sati.web.za/downloads/FreeState_heritage_sites.doc)). The last site, which is the shelter protecting our « battle scene », has the registration date of 1993, which is simply the date of the site’s republication in the official Journal. The site’s first registration as patrimony in fact dates back to 1936 (Oberholster 1972: 219-220). David Hart, who is in charge of the national inventory (and whom we thank here for the information he was kind enough to give us), tells us that there are no archives relating to discussions or decisions about the scheduling.





Fig. 12. Decorated panel in Shelter 2.  
Compare with Fig. 62  
(Computer aided drawing, JLLQ).





## 3

## Cattle in a colonial landscape

First observation: we are here on a frontier. If one follows the line of hills of the same height to the north east from the shelter, after 2000 metres one reaches Lesotho — a unique example in the world of a state (independent since 1966) that is entirely enclosed by another, South Africa. Lesotho is the geopolitical relic of a process of land seizure in the south of Africa that was begun in the mid-17th century and which was pursued for two and a half centuries. Like Swaziland and Botswana, it only owes its autonomy to the imposition of a protectorate regime by the British crown. A late (1868) and restricting “rescue”: intended to preserve the African kingdom from the ravenous ambitions of the Afrikaner republics founded in 1830 on the South-African plateau, it in fact endorsed several decades of encroachments, forced concessions and leonine treaties which had made Lesotho, at first a country of fertile plains, into a land of escarpments<sup>43</sup>. Located, at the start of the 1840s, in the heart of the “Sotho country” (**Fig. 13**), our hill is henceforth on South African territory, in the province of the Free State (**Fig. 14**), which more or less follows the frontiers of the former Afrikaner republic of the Orange Free State. The features of the landscape around here are the scars of this painful amputation: the River Mogakare (called Caledon in South Africa, after Lord Cal-

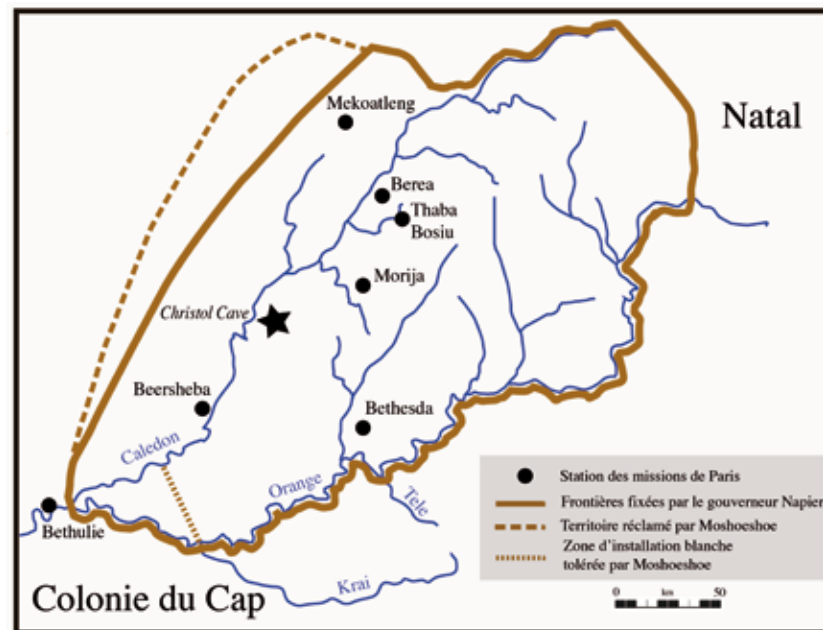


Fig. 13. Political situation of the region in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century: the shelter known as Christol Cave was then in Sotho country (Computer aided drawing, JLLQ).

edon, a governor of the Cape colony at the start of the British occupation<sup>44</sup>), which flows a few kilometres from there, forms the frontier with Lesotho, whereas a century and a half ago it formed its central axis; as for the fertile triangle formed by the Caledon and the Orange<sup>45</sup> (called Senqu in Lesotho, and recently rechristened Gariep<sup>46</sup> on

[43] S. Gill (1993 : 63-114) ; L. Thompson (1975 : *passim*) ; F.-X. Fauvelle-Aymar (2006 : 270-273).

[44] Earl of Caledon, governor of the Cape from 1807 to 1811. Mogokare (var. : Mogokari, Mogakare) is the Sotho name of this river, from the Bokare “middle” (P. E. Raper 2004 : 46, 247).



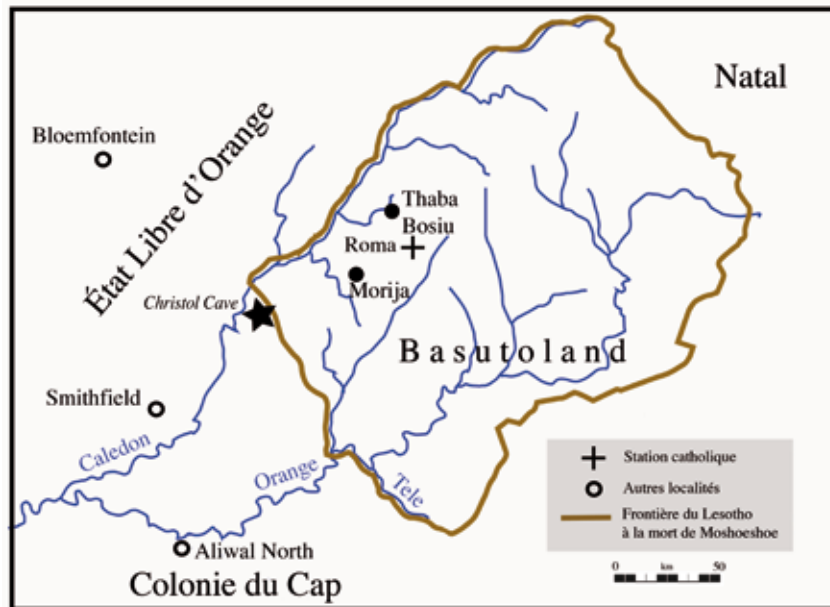


Fig. 14. The frontiers of Basutoland, corresponding to those of present-day Lesotho — Christol Cave nowadays lies beyond this frontier (Computer aided drawing, JLLQ).

the South African side) up to their confluence, it has been divided into vast private properties, and towns have developed there. Wepener — named after an Afrikaner farmer, “hero” of the war of the Whites against the Sotho<sup>47</sup> (Fig. 15) — is thus the name of the closest locality to the site, with a characteristic orthogonal plan; and Ventershoek (“Venter’s corner” in Afrikaans), that of the farm on which it is situated.

Venter is a common Afrikaner patronymic; in particular it is the name of one of the migrant settlers who, in the 1830s, left the Cape colony which had become British, and colonised what would become South Africa: the Voortrekker<sup>48</sup> Piet Venter, who gave his name to a locality in the Free State<sup>49</sup>. In 1823, another Venter, veldkornet (district supervisor) in his state, mentioned an

abandoned Bushman village on the left bank of the Orange between Aliwal North and Hershel<sup>50</sup>. And G. W. Stow reported the misadventures of a certain Jan Venter, whose livestock was stolen by Bushmen, around the same period, in the vicinity of Hebron<sup>51</sup>. Several other Venters are mentioned in the archives after 1852, notably in connection with conflicts between neighbours concerning thefts of horses and cattle carried out by Sotho who had been robbed of their lands<sup>52</sup>. In 1858, the toponym of Ventersfontein (“Venter’s spring”), the name of the property of a certain Paul Fouché, appears in a list of farms “illegally” occupied by the Sotho near the frontier of that time; but it is located several dozen kilometres south of our site, in the canton of Koesberg, not far from the Hebron mission<sup>53</sup>.



Fig. 15. Bust of Lourens Jacobus (known as Louw) Wepener (1812-1865), conserved in the Graaff-Reinet Museum (Photo FXF).

- [45] Named after the land of the princes of Orange-Nassau, lineage of the stadhouers of the United Provinces and “protectors” of the Dutch East India Company which colonised the south of Africa in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- [46] From the Khoekhoe name !Garib, “river”. The San name seems to have been Eyn, Eijn or Ein (P. E. Raper 2004 : 291).
- [47] Lourens Jacobus (called Louw) Wepener (1812-1865), a farmer who led the war against the Sotho in 1865 and who was killed during his assault on the mountain-fortress of Thaba Bosiu, the “capital” of the Sotho king in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (G. Haliburton 1977: 180-181; P. E. Raper 2004 : 403). His bronze bust, sculpted by Coert Steynberg, was inaugurated at Wepener on the centenary of his death. A sign of his enduring memory is that another bust is presented to the public at the museum of Graaff-Reinet (Fig. 15).
- [48] Voortrekkers, literally “tracers of the front”, that is “pioneers”, is a name given to the thousands of participants in the “Great Trek” of 1834-1840. See F.-X. Fauvelle-Aymar (2006 : chap. 4).
- [49] P. E. Raper (2004 : 391, Ventersburg entry).
- [50] D. F. Ellenberger (1997 : 10). This same person, or his son, also called A[...], is cited in a letter to the president of the orange Free State dating to 1866 ; G. M. Theal, Basutoland Records, 1883 : vol. 3B, p. 636.
- [51] G. W. Stow (1905 : 400).
- [52] G. M. Theal (1883: passim and vol. 3B, index).
- [53] G. M. Theal (1883: vol. II, p. 431).





Fig. 16. The oldest known photo of the main panel, kept in the Morija archives. Unfortunately it was taken after the removals carried out by Frédéric Christol.

The toponymy, here, is not a survival from the past; on the contrary, it aims to abolish it by justifying colonial claims; it accompanies a process of exclusion and expulsion which resulted in the destruction of Sotho villages and the regrouping of the Africans in indigenous “reservations” or in “townships” on the outskirts of white towns. Violence, which does not prevent certain forms of cooperation, is woven into the fabric of a long frontier war which was as much a territorial con-

flict as a conflict of narratives<sup>54</sup>. The most everyday practices endorse these crossings-out of space and memory — for example this undated photograph from an anonymous album conserved in the archives of the Morija Museum in Lesotho: it features our painting with the original caption “Bushmen paintings — near Teyateyaneng”; but the place-name was later crossed out and replaced by “Hermon”, a Biblical name<sup>55</sup> given to another missionary<sup>56</sup> (**Fig. 16**). Was this a simple error of

[54] D. B. Coplan (2000 ; 2001 ; 2003b).

[55] This name fits right into a whole “missionary” toponymy in Lesotho : Bethany, Siloe, Beersheba...

[56] This album forms part of an unreferenced series.





location<sup>57</sup>, which was then corrected? It's possible. Because although some Sotho settlements were certainly struck off the map, in the literal sense (as shown by the density of villages on the Lesotho side<sup>58</sup> of the frontier and the emptiness on the South-African site, something which is clearly visible on topographic maps<sup>59</sup>), the name of Teyateyaneng cannot be found in the archives concerning this region. On maps of the mid-19th century this portion of Caledon river territory is called Jammerberg Drift, (after the name of a hill nearby, the “mount of lamentations” or the “mountain of regret” in Dutch<sup>60</sup>), a remarkable feature of the landscape since there is no other crossing point on the river for several dozen kilometres upstream or down. This explains why this location is sometimes a meeting place (in 1854 a conciliation conference was held here between the Sotho sovereign and special commissioner George Clerk<sup>61</sup>), and sometimes a point of dispute: it was through Jam-

merberg Drift (nowadays Jammerdrift<sup>62</sup>) that the different hypothetical frontier lines passed which cut the interfluvial plain off from Sotho country. It is this line, the final stage of a western frontier that has been constantly retreating for three decades, which almost forms the last avatar of a retreating limit on the northern front, which was marked out in 1862 by one of the Free State parliament's envoys<sup>63</sup>. This man, again a certain Jacobus Venter, is perhaps the one who left his name, like an act of signature for the colonial crime, engraved in the toponymy of one of the “wedges” that the frontier drove into Sotho country.



[57] A town called Teyateyaneng exists in Lesotho, but it is located fifty kilometres to the north-east of the capital, Maseru.

[58] We use the Lesothan term to designate what relates to Lesotho. The Sotho term is reserved for the designation of a much broader ethnic or linguistic entity.

[59] The following maps were used in this study: South Africa 1: 50.000, sheets 2927 CA & CB (Wepener), and 2927 CC (Van Stadensrus), both in the 1985; or, identical in terms of the basic mapping but with a slightly different toponymy: Lesotho 1: 50.000 (Maseru: Department of Lands, Surveys and Physical Planning, Ministry of Interior), sheets 2927 CA and 2927CC.

[60] P. Raper (2004 : 158, Jammerberg entry), who makes it, without any proof, the translation of a Khoekhoe (Kouwe) toponym, sees the origin of this name in an episode during which some hunters killed an antelope that was giving birth. The name of Jammerberg was given to a farm in the vicinity of that of Ventershoek, probably after a regrouping of lands.

[61] G. M. Theal (1883: vol. II, p. 96 and *passim*).

[62] P. Raper (2004: 158, Jammerdrift entry).

[63] G. M. Theal (1883: vol. 3A, 152-3); instructions (in Dutch) addressed by the volksraad of the Free State to the delegation (made up of Jacobus Venter, Johannes Klopper and Jan Schutte) with a view to its mission to Thaba Bosigo [Bosi] to obtain from King Moshoeshe and his council the extradition (uitlevering) of the murderers of a certain Philip Venter, and the rectification of the frontier on a line passing through Jammerberg Drift. Bloemfontein, 6 March 1862. Thanks to Werner Prinsloo for his help in translating this document.





## 4

# Knot of frontiers

The mute boundary marker of a retreating and finally fixed political frontier, the hill of Ventershoek is also located on a former frontline of evangelisation. Having settled in the Sotho country of King Moshoeshe (ca. 1786-1870) in 1833, the French and Swiss missionaries from the Société des missions évangéliques in Paris (also known as the Mission de Paris) established a network of stations in the west of the country<sup>64</sup>. Located in its geographical centre, Morija was to be the living heart of this layout, before becoming its museum and archive a century and a half later<sup>65</sup>. As for the station of Hermon, it was founded twenty years after the arrival of the first pastors as an advance post making it possible to control the ford, which explains why the parietal layout sometimes bears its name in the missionaries' writings. But the rocky overhang where it is located is also called Christol Cave, after Frédéric Christol (1850-1933), a missionary at Hermon from 1884 till 1908, the date of his return to France<sup>66</sup>, who made the shelter and its paintings known. This frontline of christianisation was also on the move: whereas the Protestant missions at first were marked by tremendous growth, after the 1850s Christianity experienced a recession marked by a revival in vitality of traditional practices (polygamy,

sacrifices to the ancestors, matrimonial transactions...)<sup>67</sup>. Rechristianised by other obediences after the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the vast majority of Lesothans like the Sotho of South Africa are today nominally Christians. But in southern Africa this region is one of the most active centres of a syncretism that sees people resorting to elements of ancient rituals: indeed numerous Christians (of a historical or Neo-Christian obedience) practise or witness divination, cults of initiation or healing, in sanctuaries located on the South African side of the frontier. This has been seen as a process, made possible by the democratic transition of South Africa in the 1990s, of resistance and symbolic re-appropriation of territories that were confiscated not so long ago<sup>68</sup>. This "return of the sacred" in places from which it had been driven out often takes place in rock shelters or caves where communication with the ancestors or chthonian forces takes place — ancient sanctuaries which had sometimes been transformed into oratories by the first missionaries through the addition of stonework. Hence, when David Frédéric Ellenberger (1835-1920), a missionary in Lesotho (from 1861 onwards) and author of a history of the country based on its inhabitants' oral traditions<sup>69</sup>, settled in Masitise in 1866 to found a

[64] C.-H. Perrot (1970 ; 1990). On this missionary society, see J.-F. Zorn (1993).

[65] On the Morija museum and the patrimonial politics of the missionaries, see C. Abela (2000).

[66] According to the biographical notice by E. Kruger, in C.-H. Perrot (1970 : 168) ; G. Haliburton (1977: 36).

[67] C.-H. Perrot (1970).

[68] D. B. Coplan (2000; 2003a).

[69] D. F. Ellenberger (1997).



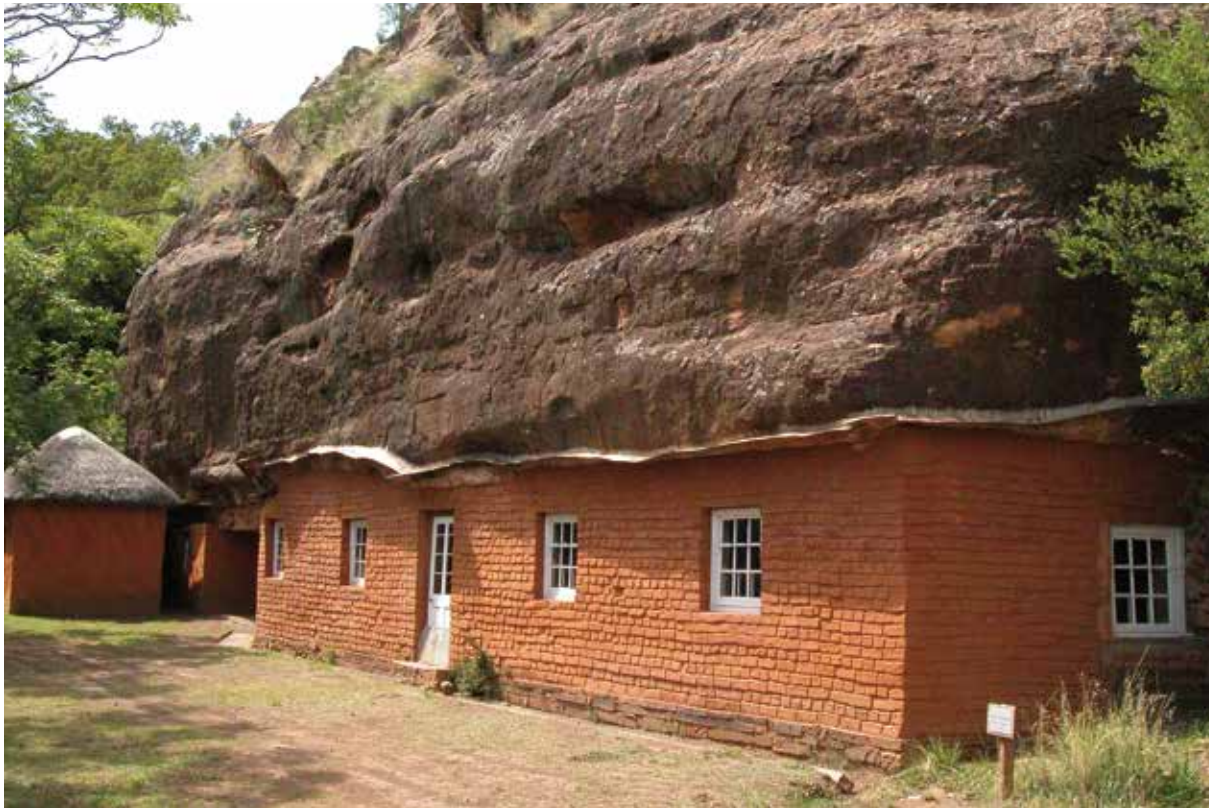


Fig. 17. The “Masitise House”: a former Bushman cave adapted in 1866 by David Frédéric Ellenberger (1835-1920), a missionary in Lesotho who made it his dwelling place (Photo JLLQ, November 2007).

mission there, he “occupied a big Bushman cave which he converted into a dwelling by walling up the entrance and dividing the interior into different rooms”<sup>70</sup> (Fig. 17).

We shall return below to another example of re-appropriation of a sacred place, that of Modderpoort, where a decorated shelter contains another scene considered to depict a “cattle raid”, and classed as a historic monument

in 1936<sup>71</sup>. The panel concerned is now very damaged, but the recording made before 1910 by the Reverend Norton (Fig. 18) makes it possible to complete those elements which are still visible (Fig. 19).

By gathering the oral traditions from the surrounding area, Norton felt able to say that these paintings were the work of a San clan which their neighbours called Makhomokholo<sup>72</sup>,



Fig. 18. Recording of a rock painting at Modderpoort made before 1910 by the Reverend Norton and considered by him to be a scene of a cattle raid (after Norton 1910).



Fig. 19. Present state of the same painting (Photo JLLQ, November 2007).

[70] Testimony by his grand-daughter, M. W. How (1962 : 12).

[71] J. J. Oberholster (1972 : 221).

[72] Another version calls it « Griqua » (Rev. Norton, 1910b : 242).



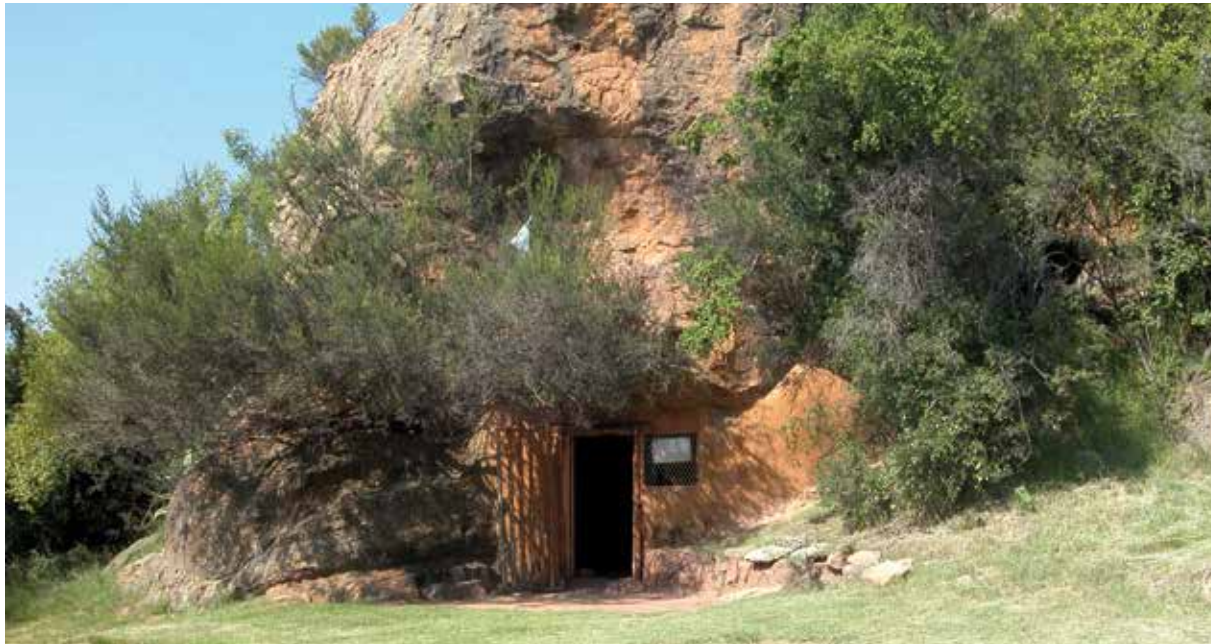


Fig. 20. The cave of Modderpoort known as Church Cave or Rose Chapel, which was turned into a place of worship by the first Anglican missionaries who arrived in 1869 (photo JLLQ, November 2007).

which supposedly meant “Great at Cattle.”<sup>73</sup> This clan was the subject of the following legend, which took place around 1833:

«[King] Moshesh [Moshoeshoe] wanted to buy two Baruti, so he sent 20 head of cattle. A Bushman of the Makhomokholo tribe (so called by the Basuto) took and ate the cattle. It was this tribe which painted the pictures. Moshesh sent 30 head. The Bushman kept them and killed the herds. Then Moshesh asked for peace and two of his daughters in exchange for the cattle. The Bushman gave his daughter Qea and another called by Basuto ‘Matseola. Moshesh also gave his father-in-law leave to hunt eland in the Maluti»<sup>74</sup>.

The story continues in a somewhat epic tone, and the whole thing bears a strong resemblance to the mythologising of real events, but

the important point here is that the rock painting is interpreted as evidence and proof of the initial event of this tale (the theft of cattle that occurred at least fifty years earlier). However, this work which, from its style, seems to indicate the hand of a San painter, depicts bovines surrounded by people whose weaponry (shields, broad and short spears) makes it possible to identify them as Zulu warriors equipped with weapons introduced by Chaka<sup>75</sup>.

Now, this site is located a few hundred metres from a cave (called Church Cave or Rose Chapel) which was adapted into a place of worship by the first Anglican missionaries who arrived here in 1869 (**Fig. 20**) — the land having been bought in 1867 by the bishop of Bloemfontein, the Rev Edwards Twells, to found South Africa’s first religious order. The

[73] Rev. Norton (1910b: 242).

[74] Rev. Norton (1910a: 116).

[75] Chaka was a king of the Zulu country until 1828. See H. F. Fynn (2004).





missionaries lived and officiated there for more than a year, with Brother Beckett as superior. Subsequently, a priory was built just next to it and, currently, Church Cave is still a place of pilgrimage for the members of the Zionist Christian Church (a syncretic religious movement) of the vicinity (**Fig. 21**).

In the priory's cemetery, in addition to the tombs of its founders, there is that of Anna Mantsopa Makheta (**Fig. 22**), a Sotho prophetess who was a contemporary of King Moshoeshoe, and whom he had banished through fear of the growing influence that she had on the population, and who had been welcomed



Fig. 21. Interior view of the same cave, showing the altar which is still currently in use (Photo JLLQ, November 2007).



Fig. 22. Tomb of Mantsopa Makheta, in the cemetery of the priory of Modderpoort (Photo JLLQ, November 2007).





Fig. 23. Rock wall to the left of the entrance of “Church Cave”, where ritual fires are lit (Photo JLLQ, November 2007).



Fig. 24. Detail of the same place: a natural cavity where the pilgrims of the Zionist Christian Church pour water which has been drawn beforehand from the spring known as “Mantsopa’s Well”, which is on the nearby mountain (Photo JLLQ, November 2007).

by the Brothers of St. Augustine. Converted to Christianity and practising a syncretism that linked Christian dogma with the cult of the ancestors, she lived at the priory until her death in 1904, at the age of 111, it is said. Her tomb too is a place of pilgrimage which is still highly frequented today. On the nearby mountain there is a spring called “Mantsopa’s Well” to which the pilgrims still make ritual journeys to

collect water which is then poured into a little natural cavity located just left of the entrance of Church Cave (**Fig. 23, 24**). It is very probable that this cave used to contain rock paintings — though a uniform red wash currently prevents verification of this — but the proximity of the decorated shelter suggests that it was certainly used by the Bushmen, before its adaptation by the missionaries<sup>76</sup>. One cannot say if this was

[76] Personal observations (FXFA, FB, Yann Potin, JLLQ, 2003-2004).





ever the case with the Ventershoek shelters, but it is noteworthy that several of them have yielded clear traces of being frequented assiduously and relatively recently: remains of hearths, a small cairn, plastic bottles... (Fig. 25).

Such sanctuaries are often associated with the tutelary and “effective” presence of the land’s first occupants, who are now extinct: the Bushmen hunter-gatherers. Indeed in numerous parts of the country, the propitiatory powers of the ancient inhabitants are called upon during traditional rituals, and even the rock paintings left as a testimony to the past are thought to have favourable virtues. Some images in the vicinity of Maseru (the capital of Lesotho) at first sight only resemble animal engravings, whereas in reality they are “vestiges of paintings from which the pigment has been carefully scraped by the Suto medicine-men in order to prepare some specially potent drug”<sup>77</sup>. This procedure was already recorded in 1904 among the Sotho who “sometimes scale off the colouring to make medicine”<sup>78</sup>. Hence, to the Sotho the San play a role of “instructors” or “civilizers”, being responsible for the introduction of important cultural elements. The Reverend Norton, for example, indicates that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Sotho from the vicinity of Modderpoort credited them with the introduction of circumcision<sup>79</sup>.

We should not find it astonishing that the present-day sanctuaries are often decorated sites, or that some of these are reputed to still be the scene of ritual ceremonies. This border region, for longer than others, saw the survival of small communities of hunter-gatherers who took advantage in a way of a moving and fluid frontier which belatedly came to a halt between



Fig. 25. Mound of stones visible in a small shelter close to Christol Cave (Photo JLLQ, February 2004).

the Sotho kingdom and the Colony. Near Jammerberg, G. W. Stow was still able, in the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to collect various traditions about the Bushmen of the region. Here there lived a “considerable number of Bushman clans”<sup>80</sup>, he wrote, but he immediately added, “except the fact that they once existed [in this region] and that traces of many of their paintings are still to be found in its caves and rock-shelters, little has been preserved of their history”<sup>81</sup>.

The rock art site that interests us is located on the southern flank of the hill of Qibing<sup>82</sup>, situated immediately to the south-east of that of Jammerberg; it dominates the stream of Hermonrivier, which flows into the Sanspruit (itself a tributary of the Caledon) after irrigating the vicinity of Hermon, the missionary station lo-

[77] M. Wilman (1910: 417-417, 1968: 19).

[78] T. L. Fairclough (1905 : 195). Similarly, at Em/a/azweni, a decorated shelter not far from Game Pass Shelter (Kamberg, Drakensberg), the inhabitants of the surrounding area come to throw coins into the waterfall and pick up little pebbles from the ground, while the traditional practitioners scrape the Bushman paintings to make apotropaic preparations (personal observations, JLLQ, 11 January 2003).

[79] Rev. Norton (1910 : 242).

[80] G. W. Stow (1905).

[81] G. W. Stow (1905: 188).

[82] According to F. Christol (1911: 14), this toponym means “Bushman Stones”. If this were the case, the final *-ng* would correspond to the regular locative case in Bantu languages, and would have been added to the Bushman term by the Sotho. So the root was probably *qibi*, sometimes said to mean “digging-stick” (*Journal of the Royal African Society*, vol. 9, No. 33, p. 99), but more probably corresponding to the term */kipi*, “digging-stick weight” (S. S. Dornan 1917: 104; D. Bleek 1956: 434). However, contrary to the above hypothesis, all our Sothophone informants indicate the meaning Qibing, “mountain of the otter”, likewise formed from Qibi (otter, *Lutra capensis*) and the locative *-ng*, a hypothesis that is supported by the dictionaries. See A. Casalis (1998 : 76, « Otter » entry); A. Mabille & H. Dieterlen (1993 : 312, « qibi » entry).





cated about four kilometres to the north-east, in Lesotho territory. According to the information noted by Stow on the subject of this local topography,

«the name of the last great or paramount chief [of the Bushmen of the region] was 'Co-ro-ko' or 'Koroko' [...]. He was termed the chief of the 'Kouwe' or the Mountain [of Jammerberg]. There were secondary chiefs under him: Palare who occupied the caves in the ravine of the mountain near Ramanapé's kraals, and Ma'khema, the chief of those in a deep gorge in the range toward the poort [an Afrikaans term for pass] leading to Hermon mission station»<sup>83</sup>.

This testimony, perhaps gleaned from white farmers who were second- or third-generation landowners, can be related to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: at that time,

memories were still vivid of those Bushmen who inhabited the country before they were caught up in the multiple frontier networks that formed during the century. Did certain individuals survive in the shelter — longer than their rapidly destroyed communities — in their status as serfs, prisoners on their former lands which had been seized? It is possible. Moreover, if the missionaries are to be believed, it was within the jurisdiction of the Hermon station, in a place that may have been Ventershoek or some other, that in the 1880s there lived the “last” couple of authentic Bushmen in Lesotho. It was these people who, by way of a bequest to posterity, gave the Morija pastors their henceforth useless hunting equipment — a bow, a quiver and arrows which still adorn the showcases of the mission's little museum<sup>84</sup>.



[83] G. W. Stow (1905: 188).

[84] In reality, while the leather quiver and its dozen arrows certainly belonged to one of the last Bushman hunters of this region, the bow has since been replaced by a crude imitation — the original having been lost. Oral tradition at the mission claims that the missionary Hermann Dieterlen collected these objects from a couple of old Bushmen who knew they were going to die soon and their memories with them: they wanted to give these objects as testimony for future generations. A letter from Dieterlen, whose ethnographic collections constituted the first resources of the Morija mission museum, gives a slightly different version of this bequest to posterity: “Leaving Ramohapi village, I went to see the Bushmen, whom I happened to know, on business matters. I bought their bow, quiver and some arrows. These are extremely rare things in our locality. I wanted to see them at their home. And what a home! An artificial cave made of a heap of stones in a manner that one builds a dog kennel. This was plastered with mud. That is the house of these unfortunate people. Themselves, two small old people with yellow wrinkled skin, thin and old with that distrustful look and extremely dirty. To chat with them is impossible. They only know their national language which is glugged with clicks and some few words of the Holland dialect [Afrikaans]. They do not have other means to make me understand them. I gave them a packet of tobacco” (H. Dieterlen, letter to his mother, dated 1<sup>st</sup> June 1885, in letters of Dieterlen conserved in the archives of the Morija mission). Finally we should note that the link between these objects and the panel that concerns us was, in a way, made by Christol himself, because there is no doubt that these were the objects that he used in his principal publication to illustrate Bushmen weaponry (Christol, 1911, p. 6), a publication that he also illustrated with his recording of the fresco we are studying. For a description of this equipment, as well as a comparison showing that this type of arrows was encountered in various parts of South Africa at the start of the 19th century: see Bosc-Zanardo *et al.*, 2008.





## 5

## In which, on an older frontier, one comes across the possibility of an ancient encounter which may have involved conflict

The son of David Frédéric Ellenberger, Victor Ellenberger (1879-1972), likewise a missionary in the same country, devoted a book to the Bushmen, who were locally known as Baroa<sup>85</sup>, the omnipresent but invisible inhabitants of the land<sup>86</sup>. In it he developed the idea that the Bushmen, a population of hunter-gatherers initially living in the region of the Cape of Good Hope, were gradually pushed back by the advancing colonists and ended up finding refuge in the Drakensberg massif and the high valleys of Lesotho, where the last survivors went to die out under the gaze of the missionaries. This kind of view of the situation, which was common at the start of the 20th century and shared for example by T. Lindsay Fairclough<sup>87</sup>, resulted in people minimising the antiquity of the Bushman presence in the region and, above all, reversing the population sequence, making the Bushmen “second” inhabitants after the Sotho natives. Hence Peter Becker did not hesitate to write — amongst other howlers! — that

«Despite their varying theories ethnologists seem to have three main points of opinion in common. They agree that the Bushmen migrated into Southern Africa from the north no less than one thousand years ago; that they are phys-

ically more closely related to the Hottentot than any other race past or present, and that they were not the first inhabitants of Southern Africa»<sup>88</sup>.

At this point we need to go even farther back in time to obtain a clearer understanding of the reality and modes of contact between these two African populations. When the first groups of black farmers, metallurgists (their material culture is called Iron Age) and speakers of bantu languages (Niger-Congo linguistic family) settled, around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD in the coastal plain from Mozambique to Natal, the country was already occupied by communities of hunter-gatherers equipped with stone tools (their material culture is called Late Stone Age) and speaking languages belonging to the Khoisan family. The two populations probably “encountered” each other in many different ways. But as far as one can judge from the archaeological, genetic and linguistic data, it appears that one major factor that played an active role in this encounter — which contributed to the disappearance of the Bushmen as societies over the course of the centuries — was the absorption of the Bushmen into the communities of new arrivals<sup>89</sup>. The same process probably took place throughout a millen-

[85] In the singular: Moroa (A. Mabilie & H. Dieterlen, 1993 : 330).

[86] V. Ellenberger (1953).

[87] T. L. Fairclough (1905: 195).

[88] P. Becker (1974: 33). Significantly, this author presents, in the same book, a map of the Sotho, Nguni, Ovambo-Herero, Shona and Tsonga migrations, with the caption “The invasion of Southern Africa” (*ibid.*: 28)!

[89] P. Tobias (1974); R. K. Herbert (2002); F.-X. Fauvelle-Aymar (2005).





nium and a half of repeated contacts, as the land clearers colonised the arable lands of the South African plateau and consolidated their territorial settlement of a good half of eastern South Africa. This was a largely invisible process, in that it scarcely left any durable trace in the identity claims of present-day populations who speak Bantu languages. But certain lineage traditions and various practices preserve the memory of these interactions when the latter are relatively recent. Hence, in Natal, the sangoma (traditional or neo-traditional practitioners<sup>90</sup>) readily claim — or at least are often said — to have inherited part of their knowledge from that of the ancient Bushmen, reputedly masters of this practice, and the rock paintings left by the latter are still considered to wield a “force” which only they could fully master, but it is still possible partially to recuperate it by scraping the pigments<sup>91</sup>. This is to some extent the case in Lesotho, where the settlement of farming populations does not predate the second millennium AD, and even remains uncertain before the middle of that millennium<sup>92</sup>. Here, the oral sources and the written testimony of the missionaries are evidence for a process of “Sotho-isation” of the Bushmen which was still underway in the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>93</sup> and which, in association with the reduction of their hunting territories, certainly contributed to their disappearance.

No doubt the almost intuitive reading of the “battle scene”, that we recalled at the start, has some foundation: Khoisan hunter-gatherers and black farmers met here, and clashed<sup>94</sup>. But although it illustrates an actual event, the Venter-shoek battle scene could only represent one of the final episodes in this continuous encounter which

took place, along a pioneer frontline in constant movement since the beginning of the period, between two population groups that differed in language, material culture, economy and even physical stature and skin colour. Of course, this image in no way exhausts the varieties of this encounter, and illustrates only the mode of direct confrontation, the one which was best able to leave visual traces in the country’s lines of shelters.

Such cattle raids certainly took place. One day in February 1809 when Colonel Richard Collins was camping near the River Brakkepoort, which flows into the Orange, and conversation had turned to the “Bosjesman”, he was told the following story, perhaps already partly a legend, and he carefully wrote it down in his journal:

«They generally conceal themselves behind rocks or bushes, as near as possible to the cattle; and if the Hottentots who guard them should fall asleep, which frequently happens in consequence of being overcome by the heat of fires or the immoderate use of dacha, they approach them softly and murder them. If no opportunity is afforded them in the field, they lay in wait towards the close of day, for the return of the herds to the farm houses, and having dispatched the herdsmen drive away their prey, favoured by the night. To enable them to do this the more speedily, they are said to carry with them the skins of lions, by the scent of which the cattle imagine those animals to be in pursuit of them. The farmers follow them by the trace, called in Dutch spoor, which they can easily distinguish, even by moonlight and after a lapse of several days»<sup>95</sup>.

Despite this, and as one might expect, when the frontier came to a halt, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, close to the line of shelters at Ventershoek,

[90] Since the end of apartheid, the term *sangoma* has had some success in South Africa, used to designate a whole variety of traditional practitioners (doctors, herbalists, diviners, mediators with the ancestors, etc.). moreover, the country is experiencing a veritable vogue for initiation into *sangoma* practices among the urban elites. This phenomenon arises both from the return of “ancestral” practices and the “invention of tradition”. The term *sangoma*, unknown or uncommon in this form in most languages of South African societies, entered the common language of post-apartheid South Africans to incorporate a whole range of “traditional” activities that were formerly practised by different specialists in mediation and healing. See for example H. F. Fynn (1951 : 274-283 ; 2004 : 241-252), one of our best sources on Zulu society at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, who presents several types of *inyanga* (rain specialists, doctors, diviners) and is unaware of the term *sangoma*. One can make the same remark about Ludwig Alberti’s account (1968) of the Xhosa. The book’s index, edited by W. D. Hammond-Tooke (1974), the great classic author on the Bantu cultures of southern Africa, is also unaware of the term. The recent Zulu dictionaries (C. M. Doke et al. 1990, II, p. 11) and grammars (C. M. Doke 1997 : item 230) give *-angoma* (*isangoma*, *izangoma*), formed from *ingoma* (dancing song), in the sense of “diviner, sorcerer, necromancer”. According to Michel Lafon, to whom we are very grateful for the above references, the term *s-angoma* could be a late borrowing from a language in which the formative *-sa* is productive, like Shona or Venda.

[91] P. A. Jolly (1995); F. Prins (1996); W. D. Hammond-Tooke (1998, 1999); and see note 77 above.

[92] P. Mitchell (2002: 344-379).

[93] See for example T. Arbousset (1991 : *passim*).

[94] Ergates (1905), J. Wright (1971), J. Wright & A. Mazel (2007: 88-95).

[95] R. Collins (1809: 33). Let’s note that the herders concerned in this story are designated as being “Hottentots”, and not Zulus or other Bantuphone agro-pastoralists.





it led to the discovery on the wall of an image that was already false. Because at that time the Bushmen had already almost disappeared. Evidence of a past age? Certainly, but doubtless not so ancient as that. Between the moment of truth when it was painted, and the moment when it was seen and interpreted, this image of a battle scene found itself, in many respects, located on multiple and partially contemporaneous frontiers: the frontier of populations

between Sotho and Whites, as well as an area of contact and acculturation between farmers (black and white) and hunter-gatherers; a colonial frontier that stops on the hill where the site is situated; and a religious frontier and zone of circulation between Christianity and the religion of the ancestors. It is this mixed-up history that illustrates its position, and which it is necessary to take into account to produce a new interpretation.





## 6

## The invention of an image: scholars and missionaries in the south of Africa

Let us start with the history of views. The first recording published of our “battle scene” was made by Frédéric Christol (1850-1933), Victor Ellenberger’s father-in-law (the Protestant missionaries of Lesotho formed overlapping dynasties that were linked to several local white families). He had learned to draw at evening classes, while he was working for an architectural firm in Paris, and before becoming, at the age of nineteen, a pupil of the painter Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904)<sup>96</sup>. He then became a teacher of drawing, travelling in Europe, Africa and the Middle East, painting landscapes and portraits which he exhibited most notably at the salons of 1874 and 1880.

The discovery of François Coillard’s missionary work in Lesotho<sup>97</sup> prompted him to become a missionary himself, and he joined the Société des Missions Évangéliques in Paris. Arriving in southern Africa in 1882, he quickly became filled with admiration of the arts that he discovered there<sup>98</sup> and to which in 1911 he devoted a book whose epigraph was a phrase by Edmond Pottier<sup>99</sup>: “There is no difference between the inventions of the Bushmen or Hottentots and those of the first Hellenes.”<sup>100</sup> Among the illustrations in Frédéric Christol’s book, *Art in southern Africa*, there is

a double plate in colour devoted to a recording made by Christol himself in the Venter-shoek shelter. The image bears the following title: “Painting in a cave near Hermon (Basutoland)” (Fig. 26).

The period when this recording was made is not specified in the text. Certainly a first recording must have been made between 1882 and 1884, the year when a certain Paul Mirabaud gave the Société de Géographie de Paris a copy of it drawn by Christol himself<sup>101</sup>. In that same year of 1884, Christol made another copy



Fig. 26. Recording of the main scene in the shelter, published by Frédéric Christol in 1911 in his book on art in southern Africa. This plate has the following caption: “Painting in a cave near Hermon (Basutoland).”

[96] As a draughtsman and poster designer, Christol produced several anti-absinthe posters for the Blue Cross and the National League against Alcoholism (cf. <http://www.museeabsinthe.com/absintheAFFICHES5.html>). In his time, Gérôme, an academic painter who considered impressionism as the “disgrace of French art”, was more famous than Courbet.

[97] On François Coillard (1834-1904), who was nicknamed the “French Livingstone”, see E. Favre 1908-1910.

[98] He also put together various collections, and his herbarium is conserved at the Natural History Museum in London (<http://www.aluka.org/action/showMetadatoId=10.5555/AL.AP.PERSON.BM000056774&pgs=&cookieSet=1>).

[99] Edmond Pottier (1855-1934), member of the Institute (Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres), chief curator of Greco-Roman and oriental antiquities in the Louvre museum, and initiator (in 1921) of the *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum*. the following quotation is taken from his book on *Les statuettes de terre cuite de l'Antiquité* (E. Pottier 1890).

[100] F. Christol (1911). This epigraph would bring the following criticism from Henri Hubert, published the next year in *L'Année Sociologique*: “What is the meaning of this nonsense? Is the French tongue so lacking in words or the author in reflection?” (*L'Année Sociologique*, 1909-1912, p. 845-846).

[101] *Compte rendu des Séances de la Société de Géographie et de la Commission Centrale*, Paris, Société de Géographie, 1884, Session of 21 March 1884, pp. 203-204.





Fig. 27. Copy of the recording, made by Frédéric Christol, given to the Museum of Neuchâtel in 1884 by Édouard Jacottet (Photo Alain Germond, Museum of Neuchâtel).

of his recording, sent less than a year later by Édouard Jacottet (himself a missionary in Lesotho) to the Musée de Neuchâtel, where it is currently conserved<sup>102</sup> (Fig. 27).

It is accompanied by a sheet of paper with, on one side, the following caption, in Jacottet's hand: "Bushman painting found in a cave in Basutoland (South of Africa) representing a fight between Bushmen plunderers and Matabeles (Northern Zulus). This copy, made by Mr. Christol, missionary, is a two-thirds reduction of the original"<sup>103</sup> (Fig. 28).

The other side of the paper bears a draft response to Jacottet by Louis Coulon (curator of this museum), dated 17 March 1885:

"I received with a great deal of pleasure your gift of the Bushman painting found in a cave; I showed it to the Natural History Society of our city, which found it very interesting [...]" (Fig. 29).

It will be necessary to put forward a scenario below that takes this Neuchâtel connection into account.

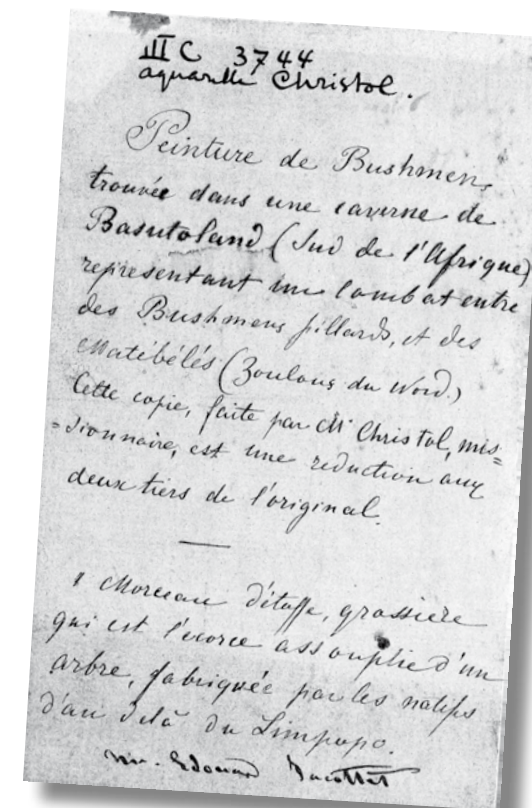


Fig. 28. Letter from Édouard Jacottet accompanying the previous image and indicating that it is a "Bushman Painting found in a cave of Basutoland (Southern Africa) representing a fight between Bushmens pillagers and Matabeles (northern Zulus)." (Photo Alain Germond, Museum of Neuchâtel).

- [102] Museum of Neuchâtel, No. III C 3744 in the inventory. Watercolour on paper, signed "Fred. Christol. 1884". A photograph (made by Alain Germond) of this piece was passed to us by Mr. Roland Kaehr, deputy curator of the Museum of Ethnography in Neuchâtel, and we are most grateful to them.
- [103] Museum of Neuchâtel, same number as the watercolour, "Letter to Louis Coulon". A photocopy of this document was passed to us by Mr. Roland Kaehr.



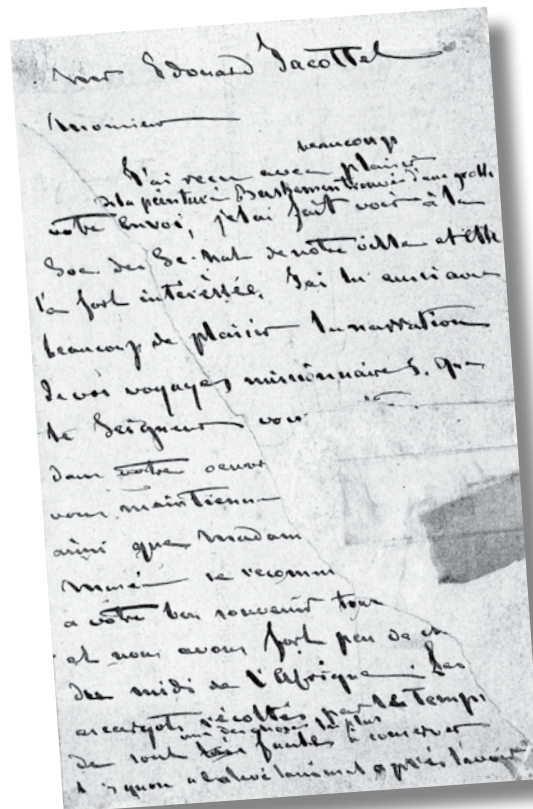


Fig. 29. Verso of the previous letter, with a draft of a reply from Louis Coulon (at that time curator of the Museum), dated 17 March 1885:

"I have received with much pleasure your gift of the Bushman painting found in a cave I have shown it at our city's Nat[ural] Sc[iences] Soc[iety] and it aroused great interest [...]"

(Photo Alain Germond, Museum of Neuchâtel).

Over the years and in the course of his publications, Christol multiplied the copies of the Venterhoek panel, all of them more or less different from each other. Hence the Musée de l'Homme conserves two others, in one of which the colouring has not been completed. The white parts are missing, and this document confirms the fact that Christol produced a whole series of reduced-scale duplicates of his recording, which certainly contributed to the fame of the main panel of "Christol Cave" (Fig. 30).



Fig. 30. Copy at reduced scale of Christol's unfinished recording, conserved at the Musée de l'Homme where it was found by Yann Potin, with the help of Manuel Valentin. It bears his signature and the following caption:

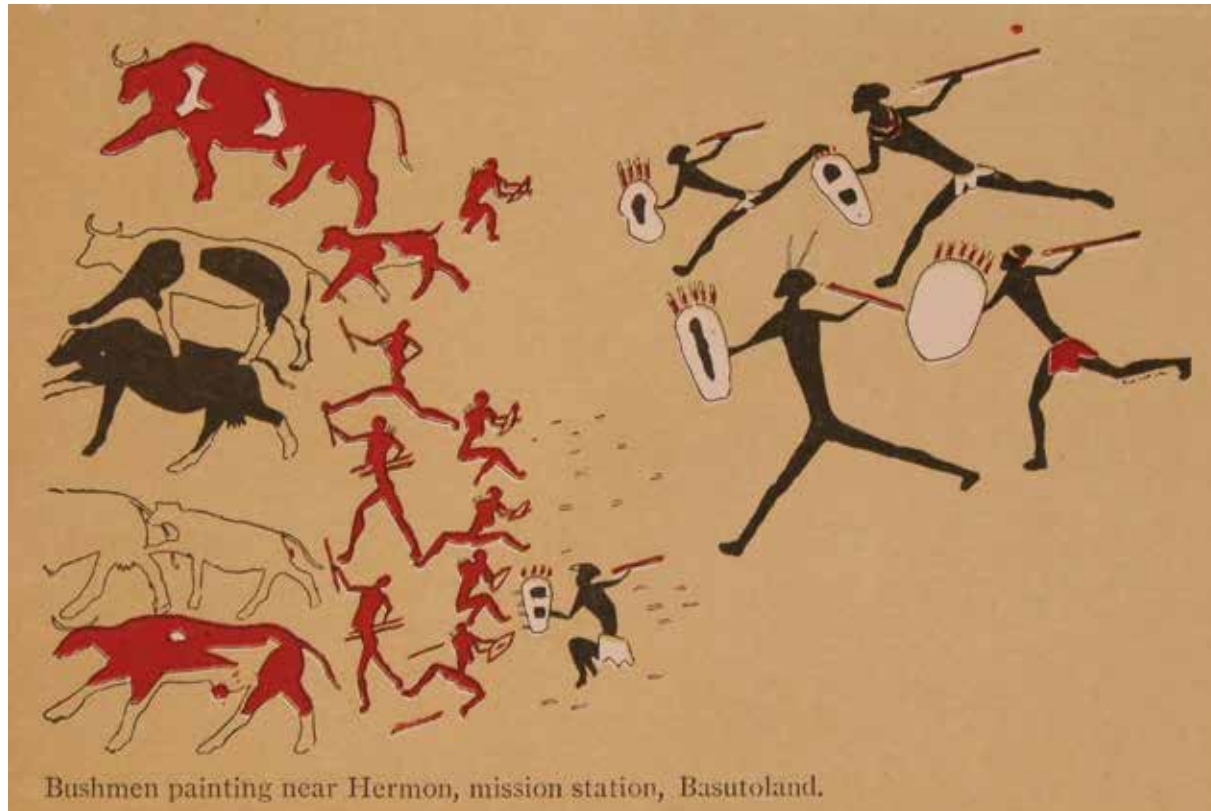
"Copy of a painting made by Bushmen in a cave close to the French protestant missionary station of Hermon, Basutoland, Southern Africa."

Another copy, complete and conserved in the same place, bears a somewhat different caption, which doubtless provides the original toponym in use before the adoption of the name Christol Cave:

"Copied in the cave of the Baroa (legaga la baroa). Orange Free State (mountain of Jammerberg) (about 1/3 size). The cave is located between Wepener (Free State) and the missionary station of Hermon (Les[otho])."

(Photo Yann Potin).





The same author also produced a series of postcards<sup>104</sup> from his drawings, and this included a reproduction of the same panel, but with major modifications: the colours were simplified (the yellow was deleted, the white often omitted), only seven bovines are now visible (one of them only partially) and two of the “Bushmen” at the bottom have been left out, as have six of the “Big Blacks”. Moreover, the respective positions of several of the selected figures have been modified, as is particularly noticeable in the “Bushman” who is running with huge strides beneath the calf (Fig. 31).

In a book of memoirs which appeared in 1897, *Au sud de l'Afrique*, Christol published several drawings interpreting works of rock art seen during his sojourn in southern Africa. The scene that interests us features prominently, in an engraving made from the author's recording by a certain C. Guillaume, with a commentary specifying that of the rock paintings he knows it is “the most complete and perhaps the most curious that one can see”. He says it is located “in a kind of cave near the Hermon station”<sup>105</sup>.

In 1930, Christol published a new book summarising his experiences of more than a

Fig. 31. Recording by Christol, distributed by him before the first world war, in the form of a postcard (gift from David Ambrose).

[104] These postcards, in our possession thanks to the generosity of David Ambrose, are undated, but must have been printed before the First World War.

[105] F. Christol 1900, p. 144 and pl. between pp. 152-153.





Fig. 32. Final version, by C. Guillaume, of Christol's recording, first published by the latter in his 1897 book entitled "Au sud de l'Afrique", and then in 1930 in his memoir "Vingt-six ans au sud de l'Afrique".

quarter of a century in southern Africa<sup>106</sup>, in accordance with the custom adopted by the missionaries of providing the public with the tales of the progress of the mission and the work of edification<sup>107</sup>. The same recording is found here again, with the caption "Painting of Bushmen in the Orange Free State, near Hermon". This is a re-use of the previous illustration, an outline drawing in black and white, prepared by C. Guillaume<sup>108</sup> (Fig. 32). This version is closer to the first colour plate than to the postcard, but some differences can again be seen: five bovines are missing, the clouds of arrows are not distributed in the same way, some of the spears

brandished by the people on the right are in a different position, and a few white weapon-tips have disappeared. Moreover, the frame added to the image by the draughtsman is crossed twice on the left by a leg and the muzzle of one of the lower bovines, which gives a very misleading image of the composition's movement, as we shall see later.

Although Christol's published recordings rapidly gave the Ventershoek rock image a certain amount of publicity, it is important to emphasise that he was not the first to reproduce it. The year of 1882 not only marked his arrival in southern Africa but also saw the death of George William

[106] F. Christol (1930).

[107] On this subject see the bibliography compiled by D. P. Ambrose (1990a; 1990b).

[108] F. Christol (1930, p. 73).





Stow, a geologist and merchant who, from 1867 onward, had recorded a number of rock paintings during his travels. When he died, his recordings were bought by Miss Lucy C. Lloyd, who died in her turn before finding the necessary funds for publishing them, and they were inherited by Dorothea Bleek<sup>109</sup>. It was the latter who published these images, not without having taken care to visit in person most of the sites illustrated by Stow in order to add her own comments. In the luxurious volume that was thus produced, published in 1930, Dorothea Bleek presented — amongst other documents by Stow — a recording he had made in a “Cave on farm Venter-shoek, near the Jammerberg”, a farm which was then the property of Mr. S. J. van Aardt<sup>110</sup>. This recording is none other than that of our “battle scene”, here divided into two plates: one for the herd of bovines (**Fig. 33**), and another for the fight scene (**Fig. 34**). Moreover she points out that “below this scene are a few more Zulu in black, and a wagon with two men. On another slab are more cattle and Basutos, some superimposed on red and yellow buck”<sup>111</sup> — but these last paintings are not reproduced.

Stow, the maker of the first known recording, and likewise — long after him (but nineteen years before the posthumous publication of Stow’s recording) — Christol, maker of the first recording presented to the public, selected the same assemblage of images out of all the paintings visible in the site’s different shelters. This selection, which their recordings and their publications placed in a “frame” which helped to isolate it from its context and fix it in that form, was made by the two authors quite independently, a sign that this painting seemed to their eyes to be immediately “telling”. As we



Fig. 33. Undated recording by George William Stow (died 1882), published posthumously by Dorothea Bleek in 1930 (G.W. Stow & D. Bleek, 1930, pl. 61).

shall see, many other visitors, sometimes quite illustrious ones, also found it so telling that its message outweighed the correctness of the drawing: after all, what did they care about the exact number of cattle or the relative position of the animals and humans? What did they care about the details that obscured the subject matter, since they already knew what this image had, in substance, to tell them?



Fig. 34. Second part of the previous recording, published as a separate plate in the same volume (G.W. Stow & D. Bleek, 1930, pl. 62).

[109] W. H. I. Bleek (1827-1875), a famous German philologist who was the pioneer of studies on the Bantu and Khoisan languages, his sister-in-law Lucy Lloyd (1834-1914) and his daughter Dorothea Bleek (1873-1948) individually and collectively left a major piece of work, both published and in the form of archives, concerning Khoisan languages, folklore and mythology, particularly those of the /Xam, a Bushman population of South Africa which is extinct today. An account of this intellectual adventure was recently published by N. Bennun (2004).

[110] G. W. Stow & D. Bleek (1930, pl. 61-62).

[111] *Ibid.*





Fig. 35. Recording by Hermann Dieterlen used by Émile Cartailhac and the abbé Breuil in the comparative section of their great monograph on Altamira (after Cartailhac and Breuil, p.188, fig. 144).

Hence, among all the documents that they produced to nurture a long series of ethnographic comparisons made with the paintings in the cave of Altamira, Émile Cartailhac and Henri Breuil in 1906 published a recording in black-and-white (**Fig. 35**) derived from the missionary Hermann Dieterlen (1850-1933) and which they judged to be “more complete” than that of Christol<sup>112</sup>. Dieterlen, who was also a member of the Mission de Paris sent to Lesotho in 1874, was station chief at Hermon from 1877 to 1887; so he was Christol’s superior there<sup>113</sup>. Doubtless one can imagine that, even before Christol’s return to France (1908) and his principal publication (1911), Breuil

and/or Cartailhac had had two recordings in their hands, one by Christol (perhaps one of those circulating since 1884) and the other by Dieterlen<sup>114</sup>. The relationship that existed between Christol and Cartailhac, as we shall see below, lends some credence to part of these hypotheses<sup>115</sup>. Be that as it may, the two prehistorians unsurprisingly interpreted the painting — because this is henceforth the orthodox view — as depicting a “herd of cattle stolen from the Kaffirs by Bushmen”<sup>116</sup>. One can see a number of differences with the other black-and-white recording drawn by Guillaume: the two big people at the upper right are in a very different position, the flying arrows are more

[112] And yet, while the first known recording by Christol (that of 1884) indicates the presence of 37 subjects, the one by Dieterlen only has 34. Moreover, the image proposed by Dieterlen seems to be a slightly modified copy of Christol’s recording and not an original version.

[113] According to the biographical note by E. Krüger, in C.-H. Perrot (1970 : 169).

[114] Or perhaps two recordings or two copies of Christol’s recording, one of them provided by Dieterlen (just as Jacottet had provided a copy for Neuchâtel)

[115] The abbé Breuil’s archives, conserved in the central library of the Museum National d’Histoire Naturelle, contain no trace of any correspondence between Breuil and Christol or Dieterlen.

[116] E. Cartailhac & H. Breuil (1906: 188). The term “Kaffirs”, from the Arabic (*kāfir* “infidel, miscreant, renegade”) via the Portuguese, in colonial South Africa designates the black populations of Bantu languages.





numerous and distributed differently, and there are four more bovines.

When passing through the region at an unknown date<sup>[17]</sup>, Helen Tongue, a collaborator of Dorothea Bleek, recorded various paintings and noted: "Here we found the mangled remains of a drawing of archers, copied by M. Christol several years ago and published by him. But now that, too, is past tracing"<sup>[18]</sup>.

Should one deduce from this that, even before 1909, the publication date of the collection of copies made by Helen Tongue, the site had deteriorated to the extent that some parts of the paintings had already become difficult to decipher? This is possible, but it is easy to see that the tracing she produced during her visit is very similar to Stow's, although it displays a few differences with the latter (**Fig. 36 and 37**). It is particularly astonishing to note that, just like Stow, she has given very fine horns to a bovine which, in reality, actually seems not to have any<sup>[19]</sup> and that, in her drawing, the white patch on the hide of this same bovine has the same shape as on Stow's recording, whereas, here again, reality is different. Similarly, the hoof is missing on the end of one of the same animal's hind legs, just as in Stow, whereas it is clearly present in reality. Numerous other details of the same type, notably concerning the hide of the other bovines and the protagonists in the fight scene, show that in the end Helen Tongue was less faithful to the original scene than to Stow's recording, which she must have recopied for the most part. Moreover, does she not omit the same elements as he did?

Following, as has been said, in Stow's footsteps, Dorothea Bleek in her turn visited several shelters of the region, in 1928, at Modderpoort,



Fig. 36. Unpublished recording by Helen Tongue, conserved at the Rock Art Research Institute (RARI), University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. This undated drawing can practically be superimposed on that of G.W. Stow, and reproduces several of its errors (Photo RARI No. HT-01-131).



Fig. 37. Second part of the previous recording (Photo RARI, No. HT-01-132).

Ladybrand and Ventershoek. With regard to this last site, she records, in a letter of 1932 that echoes back to her publication of Stow's recordings:

«a few more black figures of Zulus underneath and a good one of wagon & two men — may have been added later. On another panel some more oxen and Basutos, some superimposed on old red and yellow bucks. Very new looking panel of red, black and white cattle (also some white panels? genuine with a red and black snake [...] I have [...] not-

[117] Unknown, but necessarily situated between that of the first publication of the fresco by Christol (1897), and that of the publishing of Tongue's collection (1909).

[118] H. Tongue (1909: 33).

[119] It is that of Fig. 84, No. 13.





Fig. 38. The abbé Breuil, working in Christol Cave on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1929  
(Photo Musée d'Archéologie Nationale, St-Germain-en-Laye).

ed some white panels which did not look like genuine Bushman work, but were not to my recollection superimposed on anything, & a red & black snake. I think the wagon & oxen may be later, but that is just judging by looks, not superimpositions»<sup>[120]</sup>.

In 1929, during his first visit to South Africa for a congress, the abbé Breuil — the “pope” of European prehistory — was presented with an

opportunity to go to the site (which, it should be recalled, he had already published with Cartailhac, more than twenty years earlier), a fact which in itself constitutes evidence of the importance that the “battle” panel had acquired in the thought processes of prehistory in general<sup>[121]</sup>. Several photographs survive of this visit: one of them shows the abbé engaged in making a freehand copy (**Fig. 38**); on another

[120] Letter from Dorothea Bleek to Clarence van Riet Lowe, dated 20 May 1932, conserved in the collections of the Rock Art Research Institute (RARI) at the University of Witwatersrand (number VRL JHB 002; accessible on RARI's site at <http://ringingrocks.wits.ac.za>).

[121] The episode is related in the abbé's autobiography, conserved in the archives of the Musée d'Archéologie Nationale at Saint-Germain-en-Laye (France); consultation and study of this original typescript were made possible thanks to the kindness of the museum's staff as well as the “Breuil Archives” programme (ACI Ministère de la Recherche). The site at Ventershoek was visited by Breuil on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1929.





Fig. 39. The abbé Breuil chatting at the site with Clarence van Riet Lowe, on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1929 (Photo Musée d'Archéologie Nationale, St-Germain-en-Laye).

he is talking with one of the pioneers of South African prehistory, Clarence van Riet Lowe (1894-1956), while facing the wall (**Fig. 39**); on a third (**Fig. 40**) one sees him to the left of Mrs Kelley, visibly listening to a comment by van Riet Lowe who has moved close to one of the decorated panels (that of the sheep), while a

certain Branhol remains in the background<sup>122</sup>. One interesting detail can be seen here: above the paintings are some recent graffiti, made up of the letters DRWA, which have disappeared today, but which our investigation has failed to elucidate.

In his unpublished autobiography<sup>123</sup>, Breuil presents his day at the site as follows:

«We pushed on to the vicinity of Ventershoek [...] where we had a picnic, and went to study the famous painted panel discovered and published for the first time<sup>124</sup> by Pastor Christol, a French protestant missionary in this region; he was a friend of E. Cartailhac and like him an inhabitant of the Cévennes; a former pupil of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, he made brilliant pen and ink drawings, and even painted quite nicely. He made a careful recording of the panel, which has now been known all over the world for a long time, of the battle between big black Zulus armed with a big oval shield and spear, and a band of little Bushmen armed with bows and arrows, firing at the former from whom they had stolen a herd of multicoloured cows, white, red and black»<sup>125</sup>.

There then follows the description of the shelters and of the paintings at the site which the abbé Breuil, in a chauvinistic and ecumenical homage to his French protestant predecessor, henceforth baptises as “Christol Cave”, thus achieving a toponymic “coup”<sup>126</sup>:

“Christol Cave” is located in a quite extensive but somewhat low rocky shelf; it is a very small shelter, concealed at the front by a big block that fell down in antiquity. Outside, to the left, on a sim-

[122] Photograph albums of the abbé Breuil in the Musée d'Archéologie Nationale; album No. 2, sheets 11-12.

[123] See above, note 121.

[124] At the time when Breuil wrote these lines, Stow's posthumous book had not yet been published.

[125] Musée d'Archéologie Nationale (Saint-Germain-en-Laye), Breuil Archives, autobiography, chapter xxxvii “Travels in South Africa (1929)”, sheet 34.

[126] There certainly seem to be no other mentions of this name before Breuil. This is confirmed by G. H. Rivière and Harper Kelley: “One of us (H. K.) visited the site, in 1929, with the abbé Breuil who named it ‘Christol Cave’” (1939: 372). The original toponym was probably Legaga La Baroa — at least this is what Christol indicates on one of his recordings conserved at the Musée de l'Homme, and which he translates as “Cave of the Baroa” (on the Baroa, see note 85). We thank Yann Potin for passing us this document which he identified with the help of Manuel Valentin.





Fig. 40. Clarence van Riet Lowe examines the site's second panel (cf. Fig. 7), and comments on it in the presence of the abbé Breuil and Mrs Kelley (both seen from the back) during their visit on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1929. The person on the right, holding a camera, is a certain Branhol (Photo Musée d'Archéologie Nationale, St-Germain-en-Laye).

ple vertical wall, I discovered and traced an almost obliterated panel of bichrome elands<sup>127</sup> and other superimposed figures although they are older than the battle panel. The latter, seriously mutilated through the loss of several cattle at the upper left, is intact everywhere else. The animals are of late style, and only semi-naturalistic: all the animals have their four legs depicted separately in the same very conventional and monotonous way. The men are better,

although the running posture of the Zulus is uniform and equally conventional. A very great attention to detail has been used in the depiction of their ornaments which are painted white with little dots representing beads: I do not think that Christol's drawing achieved the desirable degree of perfection<sup>128</sup>. Since the Zulus only invaded or raided these regions quite late, and not before the end of the 18th century, that gives this last stuttering<sup>129</sup> of Bushman art a

[127] Here Breuil reproduces in French the South-African English term eland, which designates a big African antelope (*Taurotragus oryx*), sometimes also called Cape eland, elantelope, or canna antelope.

[128] Christol indeed omits some of these ornaments which, today, are almost invisible, but which were clearly seen by Stow.

[129] "Last stuttering": a curious expression (since the "stutterings" of an expression tend to occur at its beginning rather than at its very end) that is evidence for the abbé's presuppositions about style and chronology of rock arts.





date that is not very far in the past. A few additions are even later in date: the artist, or his successor, added a few extra Zulus, less marked in colour; then, in a white colour that passes to black when it is wetted, and returns to white when it dries, a few bad schematic drawings were added, including, at the lower right, a European wagon in profile with two right wheels and the shaft on this side, where one Negro is standing alone, while a Boër<sup>130</sup>, mounted on the wagon's platform, is vigorously waving a big whip. This cannot have been painted before the great Trek to the north by the Boër population, something like 1830. In two clefts to the right of the niche in which the battle scene is painted, there are a few more very late paintings: men, cattle painted white in the first cleft, and polychrome in the second. All these cattle have a "lumpish" style that is completely different from the more ancient, good polychrome style. To the left, the cliff is interrupted by a small ravine, at the entrance of which — though not in line with the cliff — is a round cavity, filled with white schematic signs, made by the Bantus. There then follows a lower cliff, with two more painted panels, one of them depicting a small group of red Bushman women, and the other a few small polychrome cattle, and, more ancient, some red animals and men with fine details painted in white<sup>131</sup>.

The abbé's report ends with this information: "while I was busy copying a few figures, the H. Kelleys were collecting worked stones from around the decorated shelters, generally from a very late Smithfield with Wilton elements." These collections were the subject of a report in English accompanied by two locational plans (Fig. 41) of which a copy is conserved in the

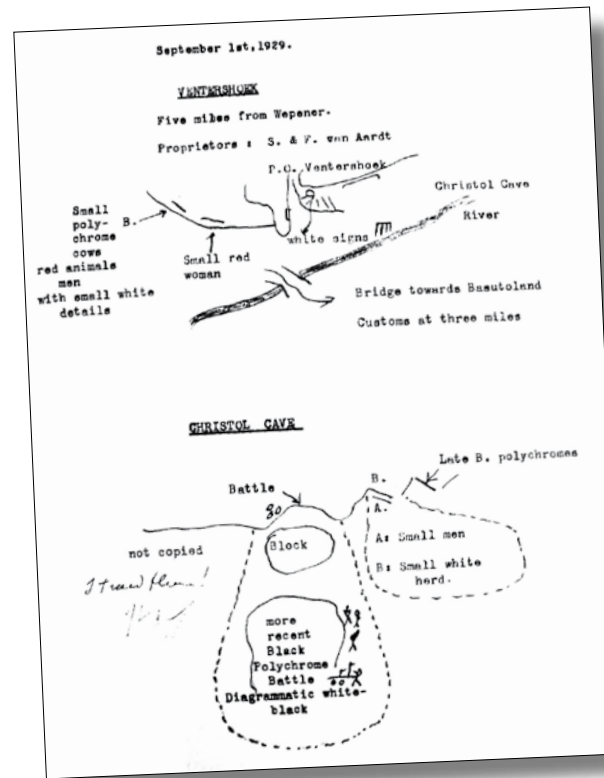


Fig. 41. Extract of the report drawn up, following their visit to the site, by the abbé Breuil and Clarence van Riet Low, and conserved at the Rock Art Research Institute, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg (RARI Document).

archives of the Rock Art Research Institute in Johannesburg. According to this document, the pieces collected at the site consist of: seven nuclei<sup>132</sup>, more than twenty-five flakes<sup>133</sup>, three bladelets<sup>134</sup> including one "resembling a burin<sup>135</sup>", two chisels<sup>136</sup> and twenty-two scrapers (three of them "microlithic<sup>137</sup>", ten thumbnails<sup>138</sup>, and two "duck-bill"; these last were attributed to Smithfield C<sup>139</sup>). The most remarkable pieces are "two kwés<sup>140</sup>, one of them relatively flat with a biconic perforation, the other more

- [130] Standard spelling in France since the Anglo-Boer war of 1899-1902 (but incorrect in pronunciation) of the Dutch word boer ("peasant", pronounced boor), the equivalent of Afrikaner.
- [131] MAN, Breuil Archives, autobiography, chapter xxx-vii "Travels in South Africa (1929)", sheets 34-35.
- [132] Prehistorians give the name nucleus to the block of raw material from which flakes are extracted that are intended to serve as tools.
- [133] Flake: in Prehistory, a fragment of rock detached from a block of raw material by pressure or percussion.
- [134] Bladelet: small thin flake, narrow and elongated.
- [135] Burin: in prehistorians' jargon, a particular type of tool for engraving or incising.
- [136] Chisel: an elongated tool with a bevelled end.
- [137] Of very small size.
- [138] Thumbnail-shaped, a term mostly used by prehistorians to define certain forms of scraper.
- [139] A type of lithic assemblage peculiar to southern Africa, and relatively recent (final millennia before present); the name "Smithfield C" used by Breuil and Van Riet Lowe (report) and Van Riet Lowe (1929) has today mostly been abandoned as a designation of these recent industries, replaced by the term "Wilton" and the subdivisions that accompany it ("Interior Wilton" or "Post-Wilton", among a number of other designations). To these remarks we can add the fact that excavations were later conducted in shelter 2 by Garth Sampson. The lithic assemblage found is quite similar to the one described in shelter 1 in Breuil and Van Riet Lowe's report: microlithic scrapers made on flakes of various types, trimmed and utilised blades and flakes, "outils écaillés", adzes and borers, pebble hammers and grindstones (Sampson 1970). Bone points together with fragments of pottery, ostrich eggshell and metal beads and an iron arrow-head, were also found. Sampson suggests a close association between the archaeological assemblage and the paintings found in this shelter. The presence of pottery shards and iron artefacts favours a chronological attribution to the last two millennia.

- [140] Kwé: a name given, in southern Africa, to perforated stones (hence the term of "bored stone" by which they are usually designated in the Anglo-Saxon literature) that are generally considered to be digging-stick weights, but other functions should not be ruled out.





or less spherical and with a cylindrical perforation”, as well as two pestles<sup>141</sup>, one of them small “made of a thick block” and the other looking like “a fragment of a kind of irregular cylinder with three polished facets and carefully rounded angles.” This last object displayed “traces of ochre and red earth”<sup>142</sup>.

It should be noted that, in addition to the two “kwés” mentioned in this report, two other perforated stones were discovered at the site by Paul Ellenberger (Fig. 42).



Fig. 42. Collection of perforated stones collected by Paul Ellenberger. According to the latter, the fragment in the centre and the one on the right come from Christol Cave (Paul Ellenberger Archives in Grenoble, Photo JLLQ).

The recordings made by the abbé at this site, which have remained unpublished until today, are conserved by Paul Ellenberger, Victor's son, who was kind enough to show them to us. They are tracings and fine copies which — apart from



Fig. 43. Original recording by the abbé Breuil, conserved by Paul Ellenberger. It concerns paintings close to the Christol shelter (Paul Ellenberger Archives, Photo JLLQ).

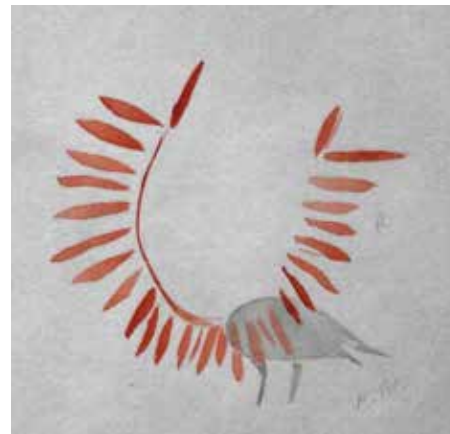


Fig. 45. Final version of the recording, by the abbé Breuil, of the schematic representation of a female apron, located at bottom left of the main scene, corresponding to No. 79 in fig. 84, compare with figs. 85-86 (Paul Ellenberger Archives, Photo JLLQ).

the anthropomorphs recorded in one of the shelters located farther west (Fig. 43 and 44) — involve several images from our panel, and to which we shall return (Fig. 45 to 47).



Fig. 44. Final version of part of the previous recording (Paul Ellenberger Archives, Photo JLLQ). An apparently intermediate stage between this image and the previous one exists in the archives of the Rock Art Institute (No. VRL-AFN-029). It could be a copy made by van Riet Lowe.



Fig. 46. Final version of the recordings, by the abbé Breuil, of the majority of the most recent images on the main panel of Christol Cave. Cf. Nos. 30, 31, 32, 33, 49, 50-54, 58, 60-63, 65-68, 69-75, 83, 85-95 of fig. 84 (Paul Ellenberger Archives, Photo JLLQ).

[141] A tool used for grinding, whatever the material it is used on.

[142] According to a typescript presenting the results of the mission from 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> September 1929 to various sites, including Ventershoek. This document was probably written by Clarence van Riet Lowe.





Fig. 47. Final version of the recording, by the abbé Breuil, of the quadruped added above the herd, and corresponding to No. 1 of fig. 84 (Paul Ellenberger Archives, Photo JLLQ).

It should be noted that the fine copies in colour often bring together on paper graphic elements which, in reality, have a very different layout, and so they present a false idea of the ensemble (**Fig. 46**). Before giving them to Paul Ellenberger, Breuil had presented them to him on 5 November 1958 in these terms:

«I have recently had fair copies made of the drawings which had remained as tracings since 1929, at the time of my first visit of a single day to Basutoland; having entered through Wepener and on my way to Ladybrand, I had stopped at Ventershoek to see the beautiful rock described for the most part — a long time ago — by your father-in-law, Pastor Christol, who copied (and somewhat mutilated for our European museums, the Musée de l'Homme and Neuchâtel) its battle between Bushmen and Zulus. This was, I think, where Bushman art was revealed to Europe for the first time. I copied nothing of the famous scene, but I made tracings of the very ugly small panels to its right. I also saw — but had no time to make a copy of it — another

cave to the left and a little higher up, containing new schematic white signs. My memory of the fresco made famous by Pastor Christol is that his drawing was very careful, as I know his black-and-white reproductions were also [...] It appears, I believe, in the *Matériaux pour l'Histoire de l'Homme*, a journal edited at the time by his childhood friend Emile Cartailhac who mentioned him to me (around 1902) in terms of warm friendship [...] I would like to publish a description of the drawings traced by me which are to its right, and of which I made a detailed copy and a few photographs. One can date them roughly to a period before Chaka<sup>[143]</sup> and his transformation of Zulu weaponry relating to the assegai (carried here with a shield, like our bags). So there is every chance that this fresco dates back to the beginning of the 19th century, while the other fight, reproduced at Modderpoort<sup>[144]</sup>, that dominates the monastery of Anglican Benedictines, shows the use of the new cut-and-thrust weapons imposed on his troops by Chaka. What I copied at Ventershoek is worthless as art, but has the advantage of presenting what the Bushmen did at the start of the 19th century, and which is certainly not up to much, apart from the famous scene»<sup>[145]</sup>.

Leaving aside questions of chronology for the moment, let us note here and now that Breuil quite deliberately — off his own bat and without further ado — saw fit to separate from “the famous scene” some elements which, as we shall see, are nevertheless indispensable for understanding it.

But let's backtrack a little. In the review prepared, on returning from his travels, for the journal *L'Anthropologie*, the abbé merely mentioned



Fig. 48. Maria Weyersberg, who worked with Leo Frobenius, examines the panel reproduced here as Fig. 7 (Archives of the Frobenius Institut, Frankfurt-am-Main; No. 09-12149 M-IP20060526\_20060529).

[143] See note 76.

[144] Cf. above, and Fig. 18, 19.

[145] Letter from the abbé Breuil to Paul Ellenberger, dated 4 November 1958. Personal archives of Paul Ellenberger, whom we would like to thank here.





that he visited “the Christol shelters<sup>146</sup> and adjacent sites, at Ventershoek near Wepener”, and specified that in “fusing together” the data collected by him at these sites and in three other localities (Modderpoort, Town’s Land near Ladybrand and Schaapplaats near Clarens) he succeeded in identifying “at least sixteen pictorial series”<sup>147</sup>, including series No. 11, comprising “polychromes of late art, with big Kaffirs depicted battling with a troop of little Bushmen who have stolen a herd of cows from them; this scene in the Christol shelter was long ago made classic by that valiant pioneer of Science and the Gospel [Frédéric Christol, of course], who published an excellent recording of it”. The definition of the penultimate series (No. 16) refers to the same site: “schematic white (which often becomes black when wetted<sup>148</sup>) and black (Boër wagon)”<sup>149</sup>.

It is well known that, as in any good stratigraphy, only the presence of superimpositions of figures on a painted panel makes it possible, in the absence of any means of directly dating the paintings, to establish the sequence of their appearance on the wall. Stylistic comparisons and panel-to-panel comparisons sometimes then enable one to establish the chrono-stylistic sequence (or relative chronology) of a region’s parietal art. The error made by Breuil, and by many other authors after him, is to have assumed a priori that all the superimpositions were significant from the chrono-stylistic point of view, while making multiple references to “styles” which he was often the only person to use. He was also alone in claiming to be able to identify them, having failed to provide a correct definition of them. So today, the chronology in sixteen stylistic stages that he had constructed during his visit to Christol Cave and the sites

of the region appears to be largely worthless. Moreover, it had scarcely convinced Dorothea Bleek, who remarked on it in the following terms:

«Abbé Breuil’s analysis of four caves is certainly interesting, but not very convincing. I know three of the four caves, Ventershoek, Ladybrand and Modderpoort [...]. I certainly do not remember and have not noted anything to justify Abbé Breuil’s long series of superimpositions, over on the polychromes [...]. I was with Mr. Burkitt when he saw his first Rhodesian caves and noted the superimpositions there, and I was horrified at his jumping to conclusions. Because at one place some chocolate painting was superimposed on red, he concluded that all the red in the cave was older than all the chocolate, though some of it was quite by itself without any superimpositions & very different in appearance. And so on. I fear I suspect Abbé Breuil of similarly jumping to conclusions»<sup>150</sup>.

Clarence van Riet Lowe, who had accompanied Breuil to the site and who defended the same chronological positions as him, would write later to Dorothea Bleek:

«The technique, or what you call ‘looks’, of the wagon at Ventershoek is decidedly decadent, and while it is an isolated drawing, its technique provides a clue to its [chronological] horizon — apart altogether from the subject. That it is recent we cannot doubt, but it is not necessarily of the same age as all the drawings in the same colour in the same cave»<sup>151</sup>.

At a date between 1928 and 1930, i.e. around the same time as Breuil, the famous German ethnologist Leo Frobenius (1873-1938) in his

[146] H. Breuil (1930). This publication discreetly “makes official” the new toponym “Christol shelter”.

[147] But the list he gives in the same publication actually contains seventeen...

[148] See supra note 37.

[149] H. Breuil (1930: 220).

[150] Letter from Dorothea Bleek to Clarence van Riet Lowe, dated 20 May 1932, conserved in the collections of the Rock Art Research Institute (RARI) at the University of Witwatersrand (number VRL-JHB-002; accessible on RARI’s site at <http://ringingrocks.wits.ac.za>).

[151] Letter from Clarence van Riet Lowe to Dorothea Bleek, dated 21 June 1932. RARI number VRL-PTA-006. Accessible on RARI’s site at <http://ringingrocks.wits.ac.za>).





turn visited the site with his female collaborators (**Fig. 48, 52**), but he only illustrated it in fig. 9 of the second volume of Madsimu Dsangara, his book of 1931. It is a selective recording of the panel located to the right of the battle scene, and chooses to show only five people, the snake, four fish and the big quadruped whose head is touching the snake's tail (**Fig. 49**).



Fig. 49. Partial recording of the second panel published by Leo Frobenius. Compare with Figs. 7, 81 and 82 (after L. Frobenius, 1931: 26, fig. 9).

This drawing with the simple caption “Wepener, Freistaat [i.e. Free State]”, bears number 567 in the catalogue of the Frobenius expedition’s recordings<sup>[152]</sup>. We may suppose that there were probably others, devoted to various assemblages or details of the paintings at the same site, but it is known that most of the documents collected by Frobenius in southern Africa were destroyed during the Second World war. Fortunately, an inventory has been made of those which have survived (and are still conserved at the Frobenius-Institut) by Pavel Cervíček, who discovered four others made at the same site, here called Mountain View Farm<sup>[153]</sup> and located at Wepener. The first, number 515 in the catalogue, was made with crayons by Elisabeth Mannsfeld and depicts two bovines, “white on a reddish background<sup>[154]</sup>” located above a small animal in grey flatwash, but they do not belong to the scene that concerns us (**Fig. 50**).

Number 516, drawn with crayons by Agnes Schulz, represents “a row of anthropomorphs, antelopes *et al.*”<sup>[155]</sup> in red, but it is unpublished<sup>[156]</sup>, as is the next one, number 517, “three anthropomorphs, zoomorph”<sup>[157]</sup>, also in red, by the same copier<sup>[158]</sup>. Finally, number 566 shows some “bovids, fighting armed men”<sup>[159]</sup>, made with a brush by A. Schulz (**Fig. 52**) who used white, black and red, in an ensemble in which one can immediately recognise our “battle scene” (**Fig. 51**).

Despite a few errors of interpretation and omissions (such as the absence of the horizontal “big Black”<sup>[160]</sup>), this recording is certainly one of the most exact that we possess of this scene, bearing in mind that it was made *in situ* after the removals made by Christol, and the fact that the copier contented herself with drawing what



Fig. 50. Recording of a painting in the neighbouring shelter (shelter 2), conserved in the archives of Leo Frobenius at the Frobenius Institut. Compare with Fig. 61 (after P. Cervíček 1976, fig. 120).

[152] L. Frobenius (1932: 26, fig. 9).

[153] Name of the hill at the top of which the frontier passes, Mountain View is also the same of an old farm located on the Ventershoek property, a few hundred metres from the site.

[154] P. Červíček (1976).

[155] Ibid.

[156] Ibid. (1976: 74, No. 401).

[157] Ibid. (1976).

[158] Ibid. (1976: 74, No. 402).

[159] Ibid. (1976: 80, No. 442).

[160] No. 45 in our restoration of Fig. 84.





Fig. 51. Recording of the site's main panel by Agnes Schulz, who worked with Leo Frobenius; he did not publish this document, which is currently preserved in the archives of the Frobenius Institut (After P. Cervíček 1976, fig. 128).

she saw (or thought she saw), without trying to restore the missing parts. As the copier had wetted the wall before recording it, the photo taken on this occasion (**Fig. 53**) shows details that are invisible on all the other documents, particularly one of the wagons located at lower right (**Fig. 54**).

The Breuil-Boyle archives conserved in the library of the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris<sup>[161]</sup> contain an anonymous document consisting of a small group of drawings made on a piece of paper which was cut out and stuck to a larger sheet on which a few comments were later written (**Fig. 55**). This group

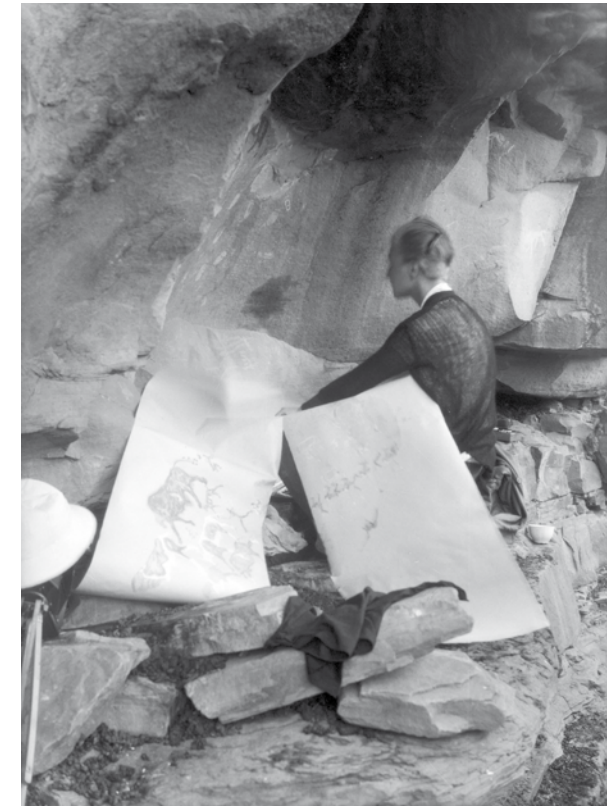


Fig. 52. Agnes Schulz looking at the wall just after producing the previous recording, in 1929. Traces of humidity are still visible on the panel, which had been completely wetted (cf. the photo in Fig. 53, where one can clearly see water flows). The scene was traced on several sheets, which were later fitted together (Archives of the Frobenius Institut, Frankfurt-am-Main; No. 09-12256 M-IP20060526-02\_20060529).

[161] Number Br67. We have not been able to identify the author of these drawings.



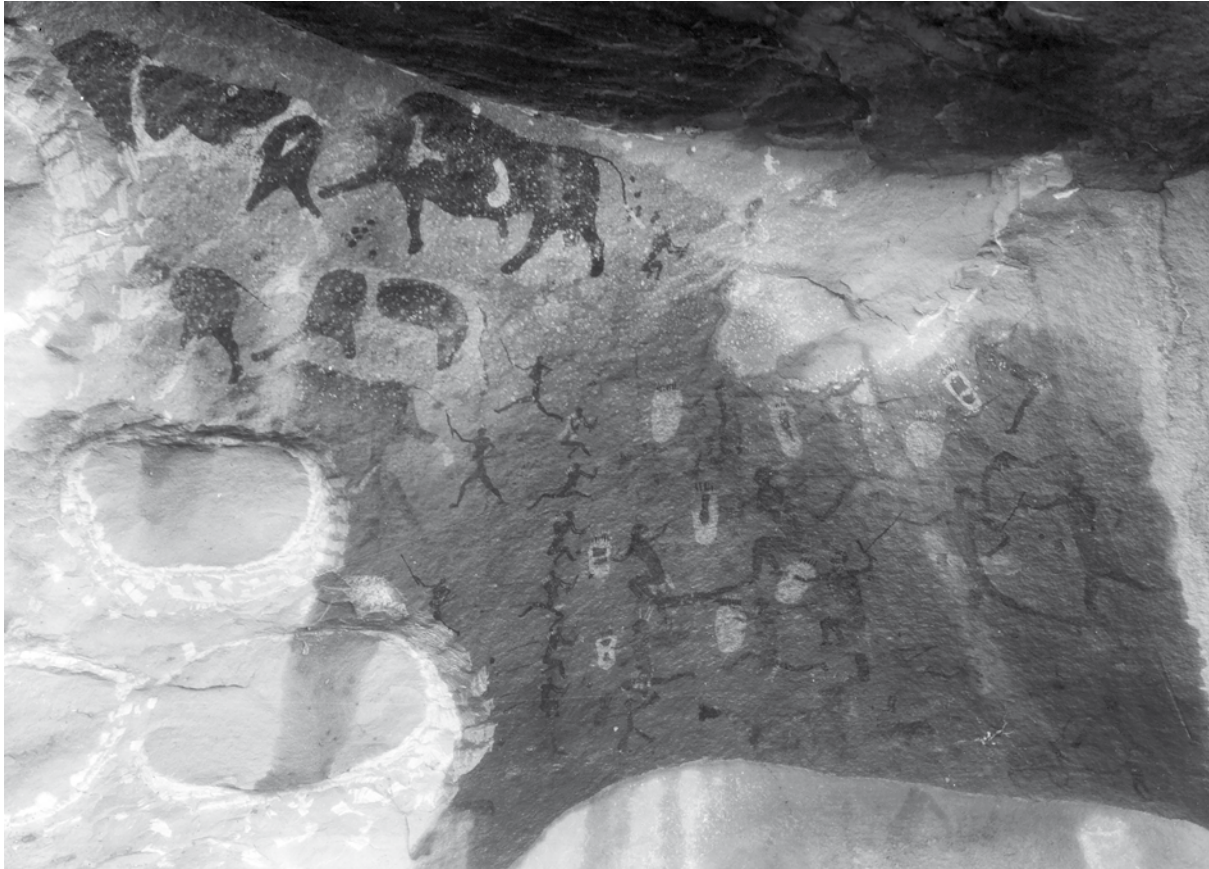


Fig. 53. Photo of the main panel taken when it had been wetted to make the recording of Fig. 51  
(Archives of the Frobenius Institut, Frankfurt-am-Main;  
No. 09-12662 R-IP20060526\_20060529).

was not drawn by Breuil, but a note indicates that these sketches were made freehand on 1st September 1929 — and hence by a person present at the site on the same day when the abbé made his own recordings (Fig. 43). And this anonymous draughtsperson had also seen one of the wagons.

Finally, in 1979, Bert Woodhouse published a partial photograph of the “battle scene”, with the following caption: “Paintings of Blacks with their cattle are generally unmistakable — particularly when shown pursuing a fighting rearguard of Bushmen after a cattle raid”<sup>162</sup>.

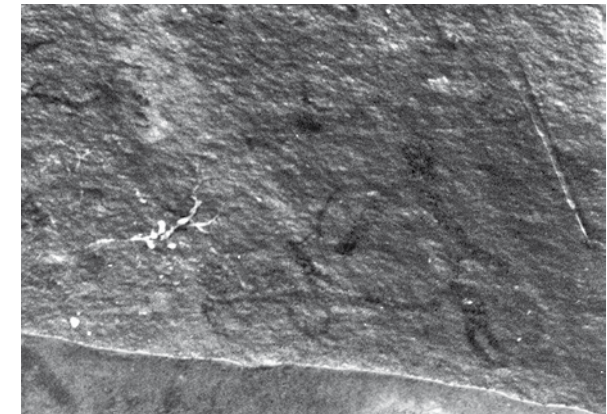


Fig. 54. Detail of the lower right part of the same photo, where an appropriate treatment by computer reveals a cart and some people.  
Cf. Nos. 52 and 66-68 of Fig. 84  
(Archives of the Frobenius Institut, Frankfurt-am-Main;  
No. 09-12662 R-IP20060526\_20060529).

[162] B. Woodhouse (1979 : 117 and fig. 143).



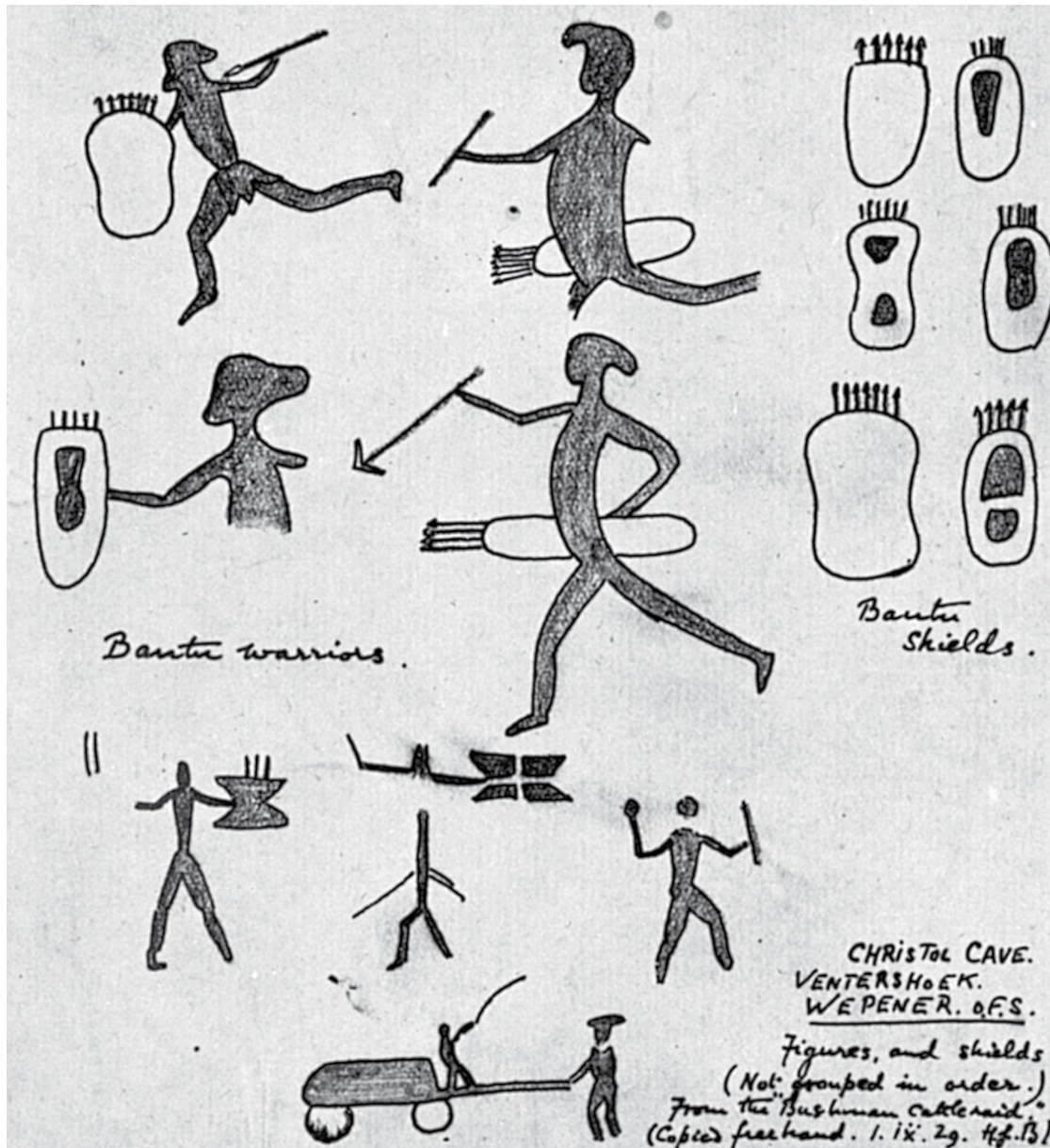


Fig. 55. Original anonymous drawing conserved in the Breuil-Boyle archives at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris (No. Br67). It shows details of the main panel and of three humans from the panel in Fig. 95. A note specifies that these sketches of the "famous cattle-raid scene" or of the "Bushman cattle-raid" were drawn freehand on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1929) (Photo MNHN).





## 7

## In which others, in their turn, begin to steal cattle

A former owner of the site that concerns us, a certain Mr. van Rooyen, reported that it was his father who “formerly owned this farm and once gave leave to a French missionary to cut out some of the painted cattle to send to France as a sample of Bushman art”<sup>[163]</sup>. According to Dorothea Bleek, who reported this fact in 1930, “the missionary sent natives to do the job, and they cut out half of the picture”<sup>[164]</sup>. The abbé Breuil’s autobiography confirms what one suspects on reading this statement: it was indeed Frédéric Christol, the African art enthusiast, who mutilated the Ventershoek panel for ever: “He had several of these bovids cut out, and they are today in the Musée de l’Homme, to which he gave them in the time of Quatrefages, I think, and also, if I remember correctly, in the Museum of Neuchâtel (Switzerland)”<sup>[165]</sup>. Christol himself, moreover, did not conceal his crime, although the way he presents it in his memoirs, written more than forty years later, at a time when it was scarcely possible to carry out similar depredations with the same good-heartedness, reveals a desire for self-justification:

«As the native name of Hermon station, Qibing, led us to think of the Bushmen<sup>[166]</sup>, the country’s aborigines whose origin is unknown, I lost no time [sic] in

taking an interest in this despised and spurned race and went, not far from Hermon, to a cave or rock shelter and where I found a very interesting painting made by Bushmen, perhaps the most complete that one can see and which I copied with the greatest care in several sessions. [...] Since I could not carry away a cave, I had a few fragments of this painting detached for the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro, in Paris, with the best of intentions, as you see»<sup>[167]</sup>.

Another piece of testimony, that of the anthropologist and Americanist Ernest-Théodore Hamy, sheds a different light on this removal, since he writes: “a fragment which had become detached from the picture at upper left was brought back to the Trocadero by the Rev Christol. It depicts a cow”<sup>[168]</sup>. Since Hamy could not, at that time, have any information about this fragment other than from the testimony of the donor himself, i.e. Christol, one can only conclude that our reverend must have felt somewhat guilty since he did not dare admit that the cutting out of the wall was of his doing, and that he presented his gift to the Museum as the result of simply picking up a fragment which had fallen to the ground by itself!

[163] G. W. Stow & D. Bleek (1930, not paginated).

[164] Ibid.

[165] MAN, Breuil Archives, unpublished autobiography, chapter xxxvii “Travels in South Africa” (1929) ».

[166] See above, note 82.

[167] F. Christol (1930: 73-74).

[168] E.-T. Hamy (1906: 389, n. 1).





Fig. 56. One of the blocks removed from the main panel by Frédéric Christol, and currently conserved at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris (No. MH : 96.10.1, Photo Musée de l'Homme).



Fig. 57. Another block also removed from the same panel by Christol, and conserved at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris (No. MH : 96.10.2, Photo Musée de l'Homme).



Fig. 58. Another block from the same panel, likewise removed by Frédéric Christol and given to the Museum of Neuchâtel in Switzerland, which still has it (No. III.C.3742, Photo Museum of Neuchâtel).



Fig. 59. The fourth of the blocks removed by Frédéric Christol, conserved with the previous one (No. III.C.3743, Photo Museum of Neuchâtel).

Basing ourselves on the memory — which was indeed correct — of the abbé Breuil, we have been able to find four of the (at least) six pieces<sup>169</sup> that were removed by, or under the aegis of, Christol: two were indeed given to the Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro (today the Musée de l'Homme) in Paris by Christol himself in 1896 (**Fig. 56 and 57**)<sup>170</sup>, and two are at the Musée de Neuchâtel (**Fig. 58 and 59**)<sup>171</sup>.

Two missing images, probably deposited in some museum like the four others, have not been tracked down despite our efforts and those of many people and institutions we have contacted<sup>172</sup>. What remains certain is that five of the blocks were removed with the aim of obtaining on each of them one of the bovines from the herd depicted on the left of the panel, but that the paintings visible on the two fragments

[169] It should be noted that other removals were made from other panels at the same site, but our investigation was limited to those concerning the battle scene.

[170] Present numbers MH : 96.10.1 and 96.10.2 (the numbers of the former Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro are respectively MET : 39.892 and 39.893). The second of these blocks bears traces of restoration, having been reglued and repainted along two diagonal lines that crossed the original painting.

[171] It is our pleasant task here to thank all the people who facilitated our access to these documents: Henri de Lumley, Odile Romain and Manuel Valentin at the Musée de l'Homme, and Roland Kaehr at the Musée de Neuchâtel.

[172] Several museums in South Africa were approached (Kimberley, Bloemfontein, Cape Town, Smithfield), as well as others in Lesotho (Morija) and France (Toulouse), but unfortunately we were unable to track down the missing pieces. Our thanks to the staff of these institutions.





Fig. 60. Virtual restoration of the removed blocks. Two removed pieces have not been found, and the operation of detaching the blocks irreparably destroyed a good part of the panel (Photo JLLQ, February 2004).

conserved in the Musée de Neuchâtel were badly damaged by the cutting out of the blocks<sup>173</sup>.

In 1998, together with a series of engravings given to the same museum by the collector Emil Holub, who wrought havoc in a number of southern African sites<sup>174</sup>, the two blocks conserved in the Laboratoire de Préhistoire of the Musée de l'Homme were studied by Manuel Valentin<sup>175</sup>. Poorly informed about the circumstances of the removal and about the site itself<sup>176</sup>,

Manuel Valentin writes that it was “in the cave known as Johannesburg [*sic*<sup>177</sup>] that he found the two painted stones, which he probably only picked up, which distinguishes them from the stones brought back by Holub”<sup>178</sup>. Yet the testimony obtained by Dorothea Bleek from the former owner of the site is quite categorical, as is the confession of Christol himself: it was indeed he who, far from contenting himself with picking things up off the ground (!), had the

[173] These bear the numbers III.C.3742 and III.C.3743, and on the second there is a label with the following words, written in blue pencil: “Painting of the / Bushmann / Lessouto Land / Robert Gretillat / Travels 1892”.

[174] On Emil Holub's activities, see J.-L. Le Quellec (2005-a: 144, 146).

[175] M. Valentin (1998).

[176] Hence this question by the author: “Did the two stones picked up by Ellenberger [confused here with Christol!] form part of a much bigger ensemble or did they merely serve as supports for a still inexperienced painter?” (Valentin 1998 : 224).

[177] Cacography or confusion with Johannesburg, the economic capital of South Africa? Other documents in the Musée de l'Homme, especially the former registration book from the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro, certainly contain the name Jammerberg.

[178] M. Valentin (1998: 221).





blocks cut from the wall, which was henceforth irreparably mutilated, and in this respect his act was totally comparable with the depredations committed by Holub. Moreover, these blocks had already been the subject, in 1939, of a publication — unknown to Manuel Valentin — in which their photograph was reproduced for the first time. Its authors, Henri Rivière and Harper Kelley (it will be recalled that the latter had accompanied Breuil to the site in 1929), compare the paintings of the two blocks with the recording that had been made by Stow (**Fig. 33**) and in particular they note that on the original of the bigger example, the stomach line, very different from that on the recording, might make one think of a male. They then report that an ultra-violet examination, carried out by M. A. Fédorowsky, made it possible to conclude that the animal's belly had been repainted, and that "Stow's copy is perfectly correct on this point"<sup>179</sup>. Since the block was broken and repaired in the past, it appears that the stomach line was indeed redrawn when it was subjected to retouching aimed at camouflaging the repair.

Why were two of these decorated stones given to the Musée du Trocadéro, and why were two others given to the museum of Neuchâtel? Founded in 1878 and set up in the Palais de Chaillot, Paris's Musée d'Ethnographie certainly had the vocation of receiving objects from the whole world that were graciously sent by generous correspondents. So basically it is quite natural that Christol, who was a young Parisian artist at the time when the museum was opened (he was then 24) and who was sent to Lesotho just a few short years later, would think of endowing the new museum with a few beautiful pieces of parietal art. What is strange is that his

published memoirs do not make any mention of other destinations for the other removed pieces. Perhaps the memory of what he sent to Paris shielded the other gifts which were less easy to justify? The gift of two cows to the Paris museum, probably during a visit by Christol to his fatherland, occurred quite late (in 1896 according to the inventory of the Musée de l'Homme), that is, more than a dozen years after Christol settled in Lesotho (1882) and well after the site's discovery and its recording (made before 1884): Did Christol remove the cattle merely to keep them for such a long time while awaiting the opportunity to visit the Trocadero? Or were the removals from the wall only carried out at this time, long after the recordings? At present it is impossible to know. But one can at least be sure that the gift to the Musée du Trocadéro had been preceded by a similar presentation to the museum of Neuchâtel. First of all, and before 1885, Edouard Jacottet (1858-1920), a missionary who had arrived in Lesotho in 1884, and a native of Neuchâtel, had sent his hometown's museum several ethnographic objects, as well as a watercolour by Christol depicting the Ventershoek battle scene; we have the draft of the letter in which the museum curator acknowledges receipt and tells him that he has spoken of this subject before the Neuchâtel Natural History Society<sup>180</sup> (**Fig. 29**). Subsequently, and through the same connection, a certain Robert Grétilat, a theologian from Neuchâtel, on his return from a journey made in 1892, brought back from Lesotho two blocks decorated with cattle from the same panel at Ventershoek, which he gave in his turn (at an unknown date) to the Museum of his town<sup>181</sup>. Does this mean that Neuchâtel first, and then



Fig. 61. Attempted removal of a painting in a neighbouring shelter, a few dozen metres east of Christol Cave (shelter 2). A comparison with the recording published under the aegis of Leo Frobenius (Fig. 50) makes it possible to assess the extent of the damage (Photo JLLQ, February 2004).

[179] Rivière and Kelley (1939: 372).

[180] Musée d'ethnographie in Neuchâtel, number III C 3744.

[181] The information on the date of Grétilat's trip is found on one of the two blocks in the musée de Neuchâtel (III.C.3743): "Painting of the / Bushmann / Lessouto land / Robert Grétilat / travels 1892".





Fig. 62. Another panel of the neighbouring shelter (shelter 2), which has been subject to various attempts at removal. Cf. the recording in Fig. 12 (Photo JLLQ, February 2004).

Paris, and probably some other museum or institution here or elsewhere, received in turn fragments that had been removed a long time before, on one single occasion, in the shelter? Or that Christol, in accordance with his desire to do good work for art and science or to satisfy requests made via the Mission, carried out several successive “collections”?

When, by means of computers, one virtually returns the blocks to the panel from which they came (**Fig. 60**), it very rapidly becomes apparent that it is impossible to reconstruct the whole of the original image. The removals were made by means of oblique cutting, and numerous chisel blows landed all around, which obliterated all or part of the adjacent images. Moreover, a careful examination of the wall enabled us to see that the damage was not only aimed at the bovines but also people. For at the location of the two Blacks running with big strides, which are visible at upper right on Stow’s recording

(**Fig. 34**)<sup>182</sup>, all one can see today is the trace of a sixth removal, which was not noticed by our predecessors. Since four of the five others were deposited in European museums, one may suppose that the same was true for this one, but we have not been lucky enough to find it. It is possible that it is now in a private collection, somewhere in Europe or southern Africa.

The “main scene” of the battle is not the only one to have suffered. In a neighbouring shelter, to the left of a group of bovines in red flatwash which are obliterated for three most part, one can see the forequarters of a bovine in white flatwash, located beneath two white legs that belonged to an animal, all the rest of which has disappeared (**Fig. 61**). A recording made by the Frobenius team restores the first white bovine completely, most of the second, and adds under the first a small animal (canid?) which no longer exists today (**Fig. 50**). These details must thus have still been visible when the draughtswomen employed by the German anthropologist worked on recording the site.

Finally, another panel, which has scarcely attracted the attention of commentators, and which associated cattle with people, has also been subjected to several removals or attempts at removal (**Fig. 62**), which make it largely unreadable (**Fig. 11, 12**). A few metres farther east, between the previous assemblage and “Christol Cave”, near what looks like some geometric drawings, an attempt has also been made to remove another bovine — it was disfigured by an unfortunate chisel blow, which led to the abandonment of this project (**Fig. 63**).



Fig. 63. Another attempt at removal (Photo JLLQ, February 2004).

[182] Nos. 34 and 35 on our restoration (Fig. 84).





## 8

## Towards a history of the wall, or the forgotten palimpsest

Beyond the irreparable damage they caused to a work of art and to the “readings” which we might be tempted to make of it today, these deliberate depredations must direct our attention to the history of the image. Rock art is often read at face value, as if all the figures drawn on a wall were contemporaneous, as if everything depicted on the wall was done so in one moment of creation. We combine the tacitly accepted idea of a work of art that is the fruit of a unique subjectivity with the assumption that it reveals itself entirely in its objectivity as a finished and complete work. And yet, the readings and destructive actions of our predecessors, like the mention of what they saw and we could not see, or the evocation of additions, re-touching or disappearances, argue in favour of a different conception: that of a changing image, a palimpsest in which, in the course of time, multiple subjectivities have intervened, conducted with various intentions, and which all produced a different painting. So let’s try to establish — or at least discuss — the sequence of the interventions to which this wall has been subjected.

It will be recalled that the abbé Breuil, at the time of his visit, evoked the succession of a “good” polychrome style and a monochrome “lumpish” style. His claim that the “bichrome elands” represent the oldest local stage is difficult to verify

today, although it is highly probable, because the panel in question, located along the path leading to “Christol Cave”, has undergone numerous depredations (scratches, scrapings...), and alas these images are almost no longer visible (**Fig. 64**).



Fig. 64. Current state of the panel of polychrome elands seen by Breuil, a few metres west of the main panel (Photo JLLQ, February 2004).

All that can be seen today is the presence, near their location, of three schematic animals drawn with a finger impregnated with a grey-blue colour, which are visibly much more recent, and a few patches of orangey colour which digital manipulation enables one to recognise as all that remains of the above-mentioned elands (**Fig. 65**).



Fig. 65. Detail of the same panel, from a photograph processed by DStretch software. The elands' silhouette appears in white (Photo JLLQ, February 2004).





Lower down there is also at least one red human, half obliterated, but which seems to be brandishing a knobkerrie (**Fig. 66**) similar to those being raised by other individuals, who hold waisted shields in the other hand, in one of the site's other shelters (**ex. Fig. 12, No. 17**). This person is of the same colour as a red horizontal oval nearby, which covers the vestiges of elands, which would tend to give credence to Breuil's hypothesis here, without being able to verify it completely.

These uncertainties compel us to concentrate in our turn on the "battle" panel, where our observations seem to allow us to recognise the following interventions. The alphabetic list proposes a chronological succession, but we shall later have to discuss its partially hypothetical nature:

- A.** Possible early phase of a "polychrome style" art (eland), seen or imagined by Breuil but only vestigial today; only attested on a neighbouring panel, it does not correspond to any figure on our recording (nor on any earlier recording) (**Fig. 64-65**);
- B.** Painting of the actual battle scene, with herd, and two opposing groups<sup>183</sup> (**Fig. 67**);
- C.** Addition, under the group of "big Blacks", of several people<sup>184</sup> who are, from the stylistic viewpoint, different from those of phase B: the modelling of the newcomers' limbs is absent and their thorax is narrower, while the objects they hold are of the same colour as them, which indicates less care taken over details. Moreover, although they are of a different style, some of them seem clearly copied from those of the earlier phase<sup>185</sup> (**Fig. 68**); a little black warrior, in the front row of the group<sup>186</sup>, is clearly linked to them by style, the colour of the shield and assegais (identical to that of



Fig. 66. Another detail of the lower part of the same panel, with treatment by DStretch software, which reveals an anthropomorph brandishing a knobkerrie (Photo JLLQ, February 2004).

the body) and the pictorial technique (mediocre, which means that it has practically become invisible at present, as is the case for all these additions); the same applies to another of these warriors, added above<sup>187</sup>;

- D.** Addition of the associated wagons<sup>188</sup>, animals<sup>189</sup> and people<sup>190</sup> (**Fig. 69**). One of the wagons<sup>191</sup> is clearly superimposed on one of the people<sup>192</sup> from phase C, which confirms here the production sequence of these figures. To the right of the panel, a person from phase C<sup>193</sup> seems to accompany a red-and-white bovine of phase D<sup>194</sup>, which could indicate that sequences C and D were contemporaneous, but it is most probable that this person originally aided those<sup>195</sup> who are guiding the isolated bovine<sup>196</sup>, at the upper right. Start of the "lumpish style" (dixit Breuil);
- E.** Flows of rainwater on the wall, which have caused fading in a wagon and several other

- [183] Nos 2 to 29 (except 12 and 19 : cf. J) and 32-33, 34 to 48 of our restoration (Fig. 84). Bovine No. 62 seems to belong to the same group, as we will show below (cf. infra, stylistic analysis).
- [184] Nos. 31, 49, and 51 to 53, and perhaps also 30, 50.
- [185] Person 49 is a clumsy imitation of 46, 51 an imitation of 43, and 52 perhaps imitates 44.
- [186] No. 49.
- [187] No. 40.
- [188] Nos. 54 and 66.
- [189] Nos. 55 to 58, and 65.
- [190] Nos. 60, 64, and 67 to 76.
- [191] No. 54.
- [192] No. 53.
- [193] No. 64.
- [194] No. 65.
- [195] Nos. 61 and 63.
- [196] No. 62.





figures<sup>197</sup>. Almost complete disappearance of a large part of the panel's right side (**Fig. 70**);

**F.** Horned quadruped (probable bovine) in pinkish flatwash at top left<sup>198</sup>, and patch of the same colour<sup>199</sup> to the right of the group of "big Blacks" (**Fig. 71**). Although they can be placed towards the end of the sequence, it is fair to say that this phase presents no precise element for attribution (apart from a great difference in colour and style, the relative "freshness", and the fact that these images "avoid" the preceding ones);

**G.** Geometric finger markings of the "Bantus" (van Riet Lowe dixit) at lower right, schematic ostriches in white flatwash<sup>200</sup> and three other birds in white flatwash<sup>201</sup> including one<sup>202</sup> under a red schematic apron at lower left<sup>203</sup> — the whole thing on parts of the rock that are not located on the same plane as the other paintings, which they seem to avoid; these finger and/or geometric drawings have a tendency to occupy the space left by the main fresco, and one can legitimately assume that they are more recent (**Fig. 72**);

**H.** First recordings of the painting, by Stow (**cf. Fig. 33-34**) and then by Christol (**cf. Fig. 26-27**), and hence inauguration of a long succession of recordings made by application of paper to the wall (**Fig. 52**), which certainly contributes to the gradual destruction of the image;

**I.** Synchronous or successive removals of six blocks, four of them by Christol (around 1882-1896) (**Fig. 73**);

**J.** Possible addition of a sheep surmounted by two oblique lines (**Fig. 74**) in the middle of the battle scene. This figure, curiously absent from the recordings by Stow, Christol and Schultz (but present on the later recordings of Ellenberger), is in a new colour for the panel. The pattern of its legs does not correspond to that which was adopted for all the bovines and

clearly indicates a different tradition (**Fig. 75**); the same applies to quadruped No. 19;

**K.** Additions of graffiti (including the acronym DRWA visible during Breuil's visit in 1929; **Fig. 39-40**);

**L.** First definite wetting of the wall on 1st September 1929, by Breuil; another wetting the same year by the Frobenius team (**Fig. 52-53**);

**M.** Obliteration of the graffiti (perhaps on the occasion of the site being scheduled on 1st September 1936?<sup>204</sup>); another definite wetting on 8 March 1957 by Paul Ellenberger<sup>205</sup> who makes very accurate tracings of certain parts which are now illegible (**Fig. 76**);

**N.** Final definite wetting of the wall, by Neil Lee, on 17 August 1995<sup>206</sup>.

Even if it is certainly correct in general, this sequence still presents some areas of uncertainty which we have not succeeded in reducing. Hence, quadruped No. 19, which is absent from the recordings by Stow and Christol, had its head amputated through the removals carried out under the aegis of the latter, and it is thus possible to think that this animal was added between the execution of the recordings (phase H) and the removals (phase I).

It would therefore be particularly dangerous, at this stage, to claim to be able to "fit" the whole of this sequence into an absolute chronology, apart from the events that have occurred during the past century. The only conceivable observation is that the addition of the wagons and associated figures could not have been carried out before the arrival of the White pioneers (Voortrekkers) in the region, in the mid-1830s or, let us say, at the earliest before the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>207</sup>. Moreover, it should be noted that, of all the various interventions that then

[197] Id.: In particular Nos. 54-57.

[198] No. 1.

[199] No. 59.

[200] Nos. 77, 78.

[201] Nos. 80, 96, 97.

[202] No. 80.

[203] No. 79.

[204] On the site's scheduling, see *supra* note 42.

[205] Judging by the photos taken by him that day, and which he kindly showed to one of us (JLLQ).

[206] According to the database of the Rock Art Research Institute (RARI) of the University of Witwatersrand (<http://ringingrocks.wits.ac.za>), which presents photos of this researcher in which it is clear that the wall was entirely wetted. We thank Benjamin Smith for allowing us access to high-definition versions of these images, and we should specify that RARI is an institution whose vocation is in part the archiving and study of numerous collections of photographs of rock art from all of southern Africa. The fact that, among these collections, there are bequests containing photos taken after moistening of wall does not make RARI responsible in any way } it did not finance the making of these documents, and merely ensures their protection.

[207] From 1834 onward, that date of the start of the great Afrikaner migration (Great Trek), most of the columns of Voortrekkers crossed the Orange and swept into the high valleys of its right-bank tributaries (including the Caledon), between the Sotho chiefdoms to the east and the Griqua chiefdoms to the west; F.-X. Fauvelle-Aymar (2006). Some Afrikaner commandos may certainly have frequented the region since the start of the 1830s, and Griqua or Korana commandos since the 1800s, but these mounted militias did not generally use wagons; N. Etherington (2001 : 51-55, 93-97).



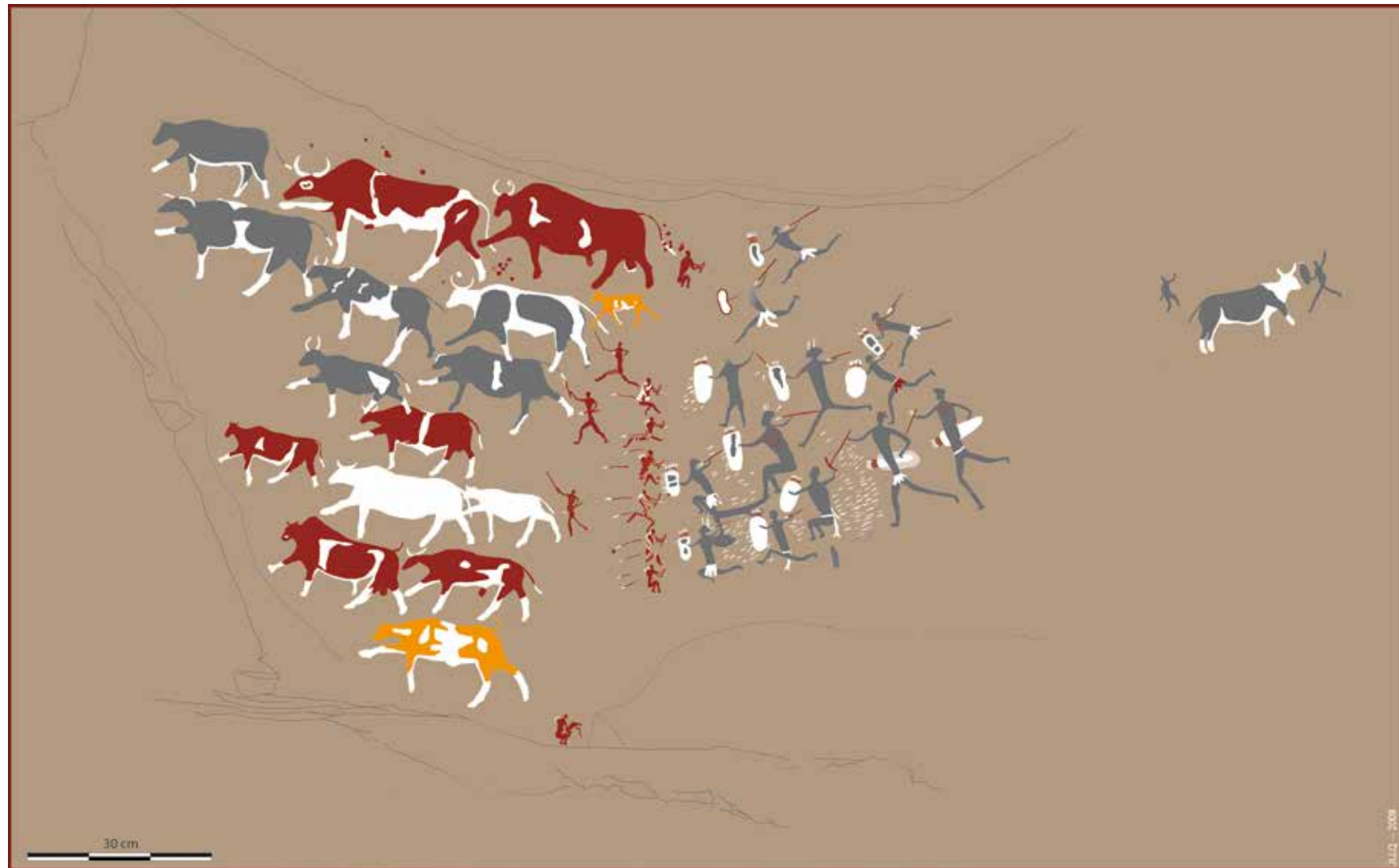


Fig. 67. Restoration of the original state of the main panel, which then only comprised the herd and the fight scene (Computer aided drawing, JLLQ).



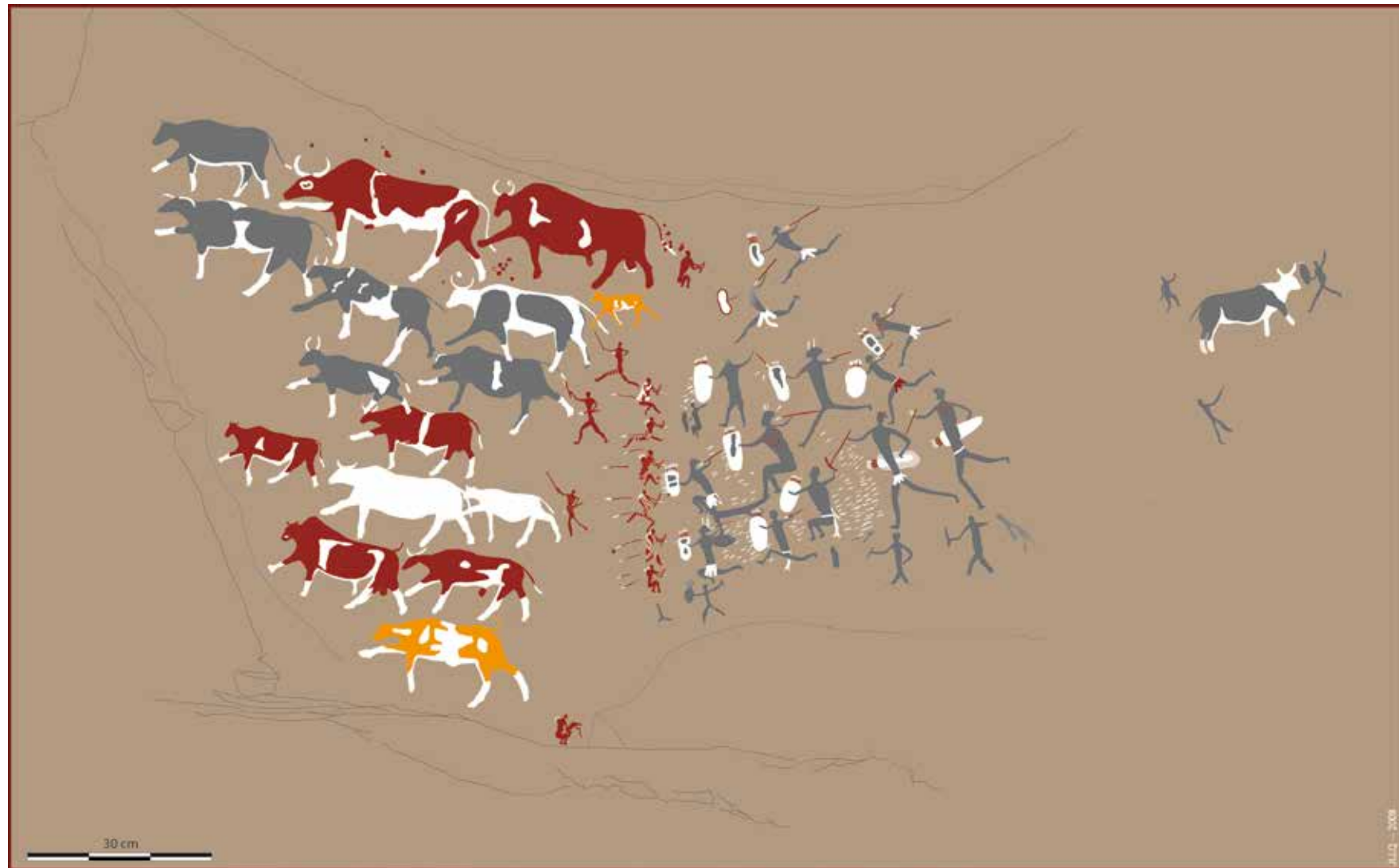


Fig. 68. Second stage of the same panel, with the addition of a series of black humans, some of them inspired by the preceding ones (Computer aided drawing, JLLQ).





Fig. 69. Third stage of the same panel, with the addition of two carts, associated with people and animals (Computer aided drawing, JLLQ).





Fig. 70. Fourth stage of the same panel: a flow of rainwater has gradually made some of the images in the right part disappear (Computer aided drawing, JLLQ).



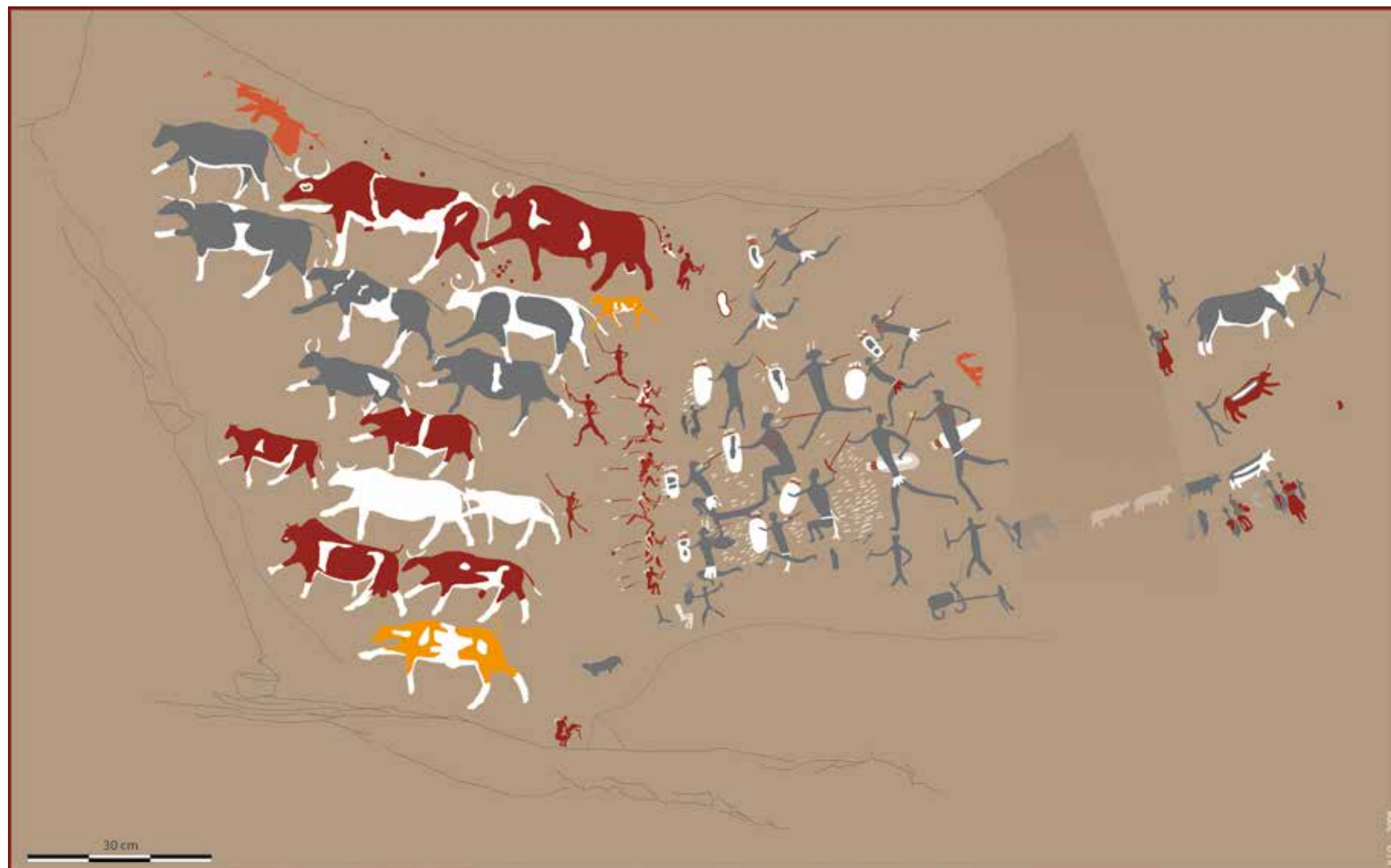


Fig. 71. Fifth stage of the same panel: addition of a bovine in bright red flatwash at top left, and of a patch of the same colour to the right of the group of big black warriors (Computer aided drawing, JLLQ).



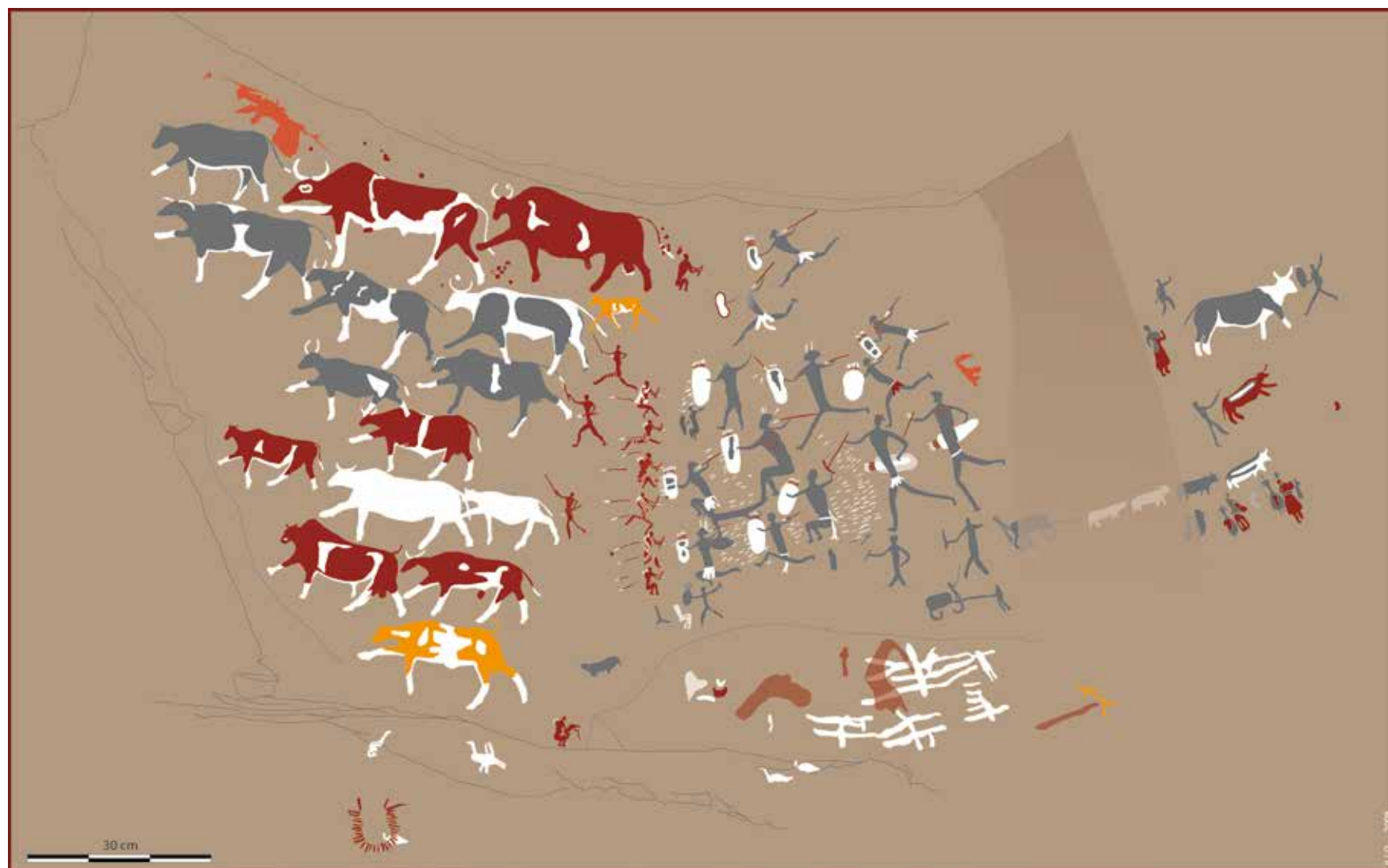


Fig. 72. Sixth stage of the same panel: addition of the finger tracings under the principal scene (Computer aided drawing, JLLQ).





Fig. 73. Seventh stage of the same panel: the removal of six blocks (at least four of which were detached on the orders of Frédéric Christol) definitively disfigures the assemblage (Computer aided drawing, JLLQ).





Fig. 74. Addition to the assemblage of a sheep accompanied by two oblique lines (Computer aided drawing, JLLQ).





followed, the main consequence of the most unfortunate of them was to render a good part of the panel definitively illegible. Finally, let us add that the examination of the natural weathering leads one to think that, in addition, part of the paintings is missing on the right, having been totally destroyed by a flow of rainwater. This assumption is confirmed in situ by the fact that to the right of it one can still see, after a fashion, two bovines (one in white flatwash, in Breuil's "lumpish" style, and the other similar to those in the left part of the panel). Paul Ellenberger had certainly seen these images, and on his tracings which were made at the site on 7 October 1957, as well as on their finished copies, one can recognise in particular the oxen pulling one of the wagons, as well as the people, apparently dressed "in European style"<sup>208</sup>, who accompany them (Fig. 76, 77). To this one can add the obliteration of certain figures, especially in the group of black warriors. The most serious blow suffered by the site is the damage caused to this panel by the removals. The comparison of the wall's present state (Fig. 6) with the old documents shows that in fact it is not just five bovines of the herd that are missing (one per removed block), but that out of a herd originally comprising seventeen head of cattle, one can now only see five complete and six partial beasts in situ. The blocks in the museums enable one to see two complete bovines (Fig. 56, 57), but two others which are considerably mutilated (Fig. 58, 59); at least four have completely disappeared and are henceforth irretrievable, a last one corresponds to the block that has not been rediscovered, and two of the big black people have also disappeared. Apart from these man-made and natural mutilations of the

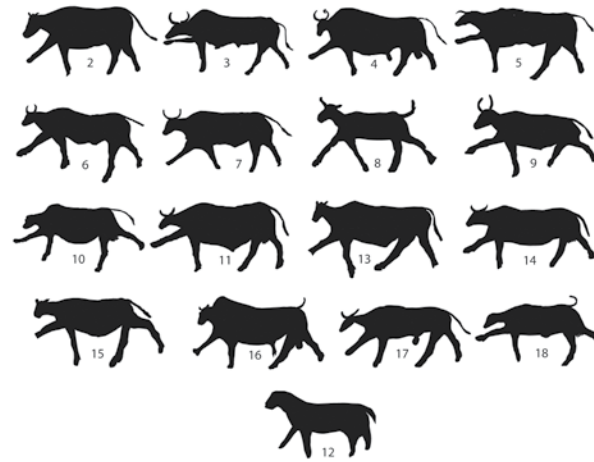


Fig. 75. Comparison of the bovines in the herd (No. 2-18) and the sheep added later (No. 12), revealing the stylistic difference in the treatment of the latter. The numbers are the same as those in Fig. 84, but the scale of the subjects has not been respected (Computer aided drawing, JLLQ).

panel, reading it has been made more complicated in turn by the successive additions of certain figures, some of which may even postdate the execution of the first recordings by Stow and then Christol — where these additions are concerned, one cannot completely discard the hypothesis that they may have been, in some way, brought about by the interest shown in this fresco.

A history as chaotic as that of this parietal palimpsest — on which the successive inflictions of damage implied the more-or-less long-term disappearance of an inestimable testimony to the past — could not fail to incite its visitors to confirm definitively the truth for posterity, through restitution or interpretation.



Fig. 76. Recording of some of the people wearing European-style clothes, made by Paul Ellenberger on 7 October 1957. Cf. Nos. 69-76 of Fig. 84 (Paul Ellenberger Archives, Photo JLLQ).

[208] Moreover, these people adopt the stereotypical posture which the painters of southern Africa generally ascribed to Europeans, that is, hands on hips (J.-D. Lewis-Williams & B. W. Smith, 1998: 15).





Fig. 77. Synthetic restoration of the main panel of Christol Cave, produced by Paul Ellenberger (after P. Ellenberger, 2003: 24).



Fig. 78. Recording of the main panel, produced by Victor Ellenberger. Exhibited in the Musée de l'Homme (Paris) in 1950-1951, it now decorates the museum installed in the family home of the Ellenbergers at Masitise in Lesotho (cf. Fig. 17) (Photo JLLQ, February 2004).



Fig. 79. Another recording by Victor Ellenberger, also displayed in the "Masitise Cave House" (Photo JLLQ, February 2004).



Fig. 80. Restoration of the main panel exhibited in the Museum of Bloemfontein until 2004-2005 (Photo Gabriel Tlhapi, Museum of Bloemfontein, 2004).





## 9

## Of the principle of the comic strip applied to rock art, and of the false childhood memory of a great prehistorian

A publication of the Association Française pour l'Étude des Bushmen Artistes Txam (AFE-BAT), presided over by Paul Ellenberger (Victor's son), states that "in order to restore this fresco, which is now mutilated, Paul Ellenberger was able to rediscover the missing pieces conserved in the Museum of Neuchâtel, the Musée de l'Homme in Paris and in the Museum of Kimberley (or of Cape Town) in South Africa"<sup>209</sup>. The original of the figure published in support of this claim, a work by Paul Ellenberger (**Fig. 77**), measures 1.33 x 2.40 m. The unknown location of at least two fragments — which in reality are not in any of the museums mentioned — confirms the feeling that such a reconstruction cannot have been based merely on the reassembly invoked here, especially since the removals, as we have seen, have made several parts of the original fresco disappear irreparably. In reality, although the claim presents the result of an investigation parallel to our own, the reconstruction is certainly very dependent on older recordings (at least those by Stow and Christol, if not that by Dieterlen). The same applies to the copy of the panel by Victor Ellenberger, exhibited at the Musée de l'Homme in 1950-1951, and which at present decorates the museum installed in the Ellenberger family home at Masitise in Le-

sotho<sup>210</sup> (**Fig. 78**). Another recording by Victor Ellenberger, likewise exhibited in the "Masitise Cave House" (**Fig. 79**), is so complete (albeit not exhaustive, however) that it can only have taken into account the preceding recordings.... unless in reality Victor Ellenberger was the first person to record the wall when it was still complete, that is, before Christol's interventions — which our conversations with Paul Ellenberger have been unable to establish<sup>211</sup>.

The Museum in Bloemfontein (South Africa), the provincial capital of the Free State, has also installed a reconstruction of the panel. Before its renovation in 2005, a display case used to present<sup>212</sup> what looks like a facsimile of the wall<sup>213</sup>, clearly reconstituted on the basis of the copies by Stow and Christol and which, despite its apparently accurate aspects, contains some serious omissions and errors. For example one can see that the stick raised by one of the cowherds<sup>214</sup> ends in a kind of white armature, whereas this is in reality merely the white tuft on the tail of the preceding bovine (**Fig. 80**).

These two attempts at reconstruction clearly arise, each in its manner, from patrimonial objectives. But the statement that accompanies them illustrates the difficulty that one generally feels in distinguishing the "truth" of the image and the

[209] P. Ellenberger (2003: 24).

[210] A nearby museum label recalls that 150 of the hundreds of recordings made by Victor and Paul Ellenberger were exhibited in the Musée de l'Homme during the 1950s. It specifies that "the drawings were traced from the actual paintings on the rock, and careful note was made of the original tints by means of a special chart based on the pristine vividness of the colouring before the ravages of time and weather" (Personal observation, JLLQ, 5 November 2004).

[211] The hypothesis that certain figures were added after the recordings by Stow and Christol would weaken this possibility.

[212] This observation dates from 2004. During a visit in 2006, we noted that the panel had been taken down.

[213] We are extremely grateful to Gabriel Tlhabi who provided us with a photo of this reconstruction.

[214] No. 24 in our reconstruction (fig. 84).





“truth” of its meaning. So let’s start here by returning to the interpretations to which this battle scene has given rise. Honour where honour is due, so let us see what Christol had to say. His opinion about this painting evolved perceptibly through time. In 1911 he noted:

«It is located near Hermon station, in the rugged region known as Qibing, that is Bushmen Stones, and it is by far the most important and the most beautiful of all those we were able to see. It depicts some Ma-Tabeles attacking Bushmen. A few of the latter are facing the enemy, while several of them are chasing a herd — perhaps of stolen cattle, one does not know — but the Bushmen are feeling small and also a little afraid — one cannot have all the qualities! — in the face of their big and formidable black adversaries; however they are standing firm and have already killed one of the latter»<sup>215</sup>.

Albeit prudently (“one does not know” — he writes), the hypothesis of a cattle raid is put forward here by Christol to justify the attack of the big Blacks — which thus becomes a counter-attack. But 29 years later, the same author was to become much more affirmative, and would stipulate that the panel:

«represents some Bosjesmamen [sic] stealing a herd of cattle and pursued by some Matabeles armed with assegais; the latter are gigantic whereas the “little yellow men” are tiny, but they are armed with their bows and equipped with poisoned arrows, which made them dangerous to all their enemies»<sup>216</sup>.

Does this mean that, after his return to France, Cartailhac’s friend<sup>217</sup> was influenced by his reading or even by some discussion with the

illustrious prehistorian? This is not impossible, and it may not be a coincidence that in the very year when Christol made public his new reading of the scene, Dorothea Bleek also published her own, according to which the panel depicted “a cattle raid”. Using Stow’s copy, she produced the following interpretation:

«Three Bushmen driving off the herd, the others acting as rear-guard to fight the Zulu who are rushing up to recapture their possessions. The two races are distinctly characterized by their size, feet, shape of heads, and equipment. The yellow is rather out of place, otherwise the markings of the cattle may be seen in native herds today. This is clearly a recent painting, probably dating from the Zulu invasion of about 1821, yet it is one of the best group paintings, a sign that the artist belonged to no decadent race»<sup>218</sup>.

Bert Woodhouse, who included this site in his selection of “40 significant Bushman rock-art sites”<sup>219</sup> of southern Africa, wrote, about this same panel:

«One of the scenes is a narrative of a Bushman raid on cattle belonging to a black tribe. The cattle are driven away towards the left while a vertical line of Bushmen painted in red, armed with bows and arrows, fights a rearguard action against the pursuing enemy who are armed with shields and assegais»<sup>220</sup>.

The same kind of interpretation inspired the reconstruction proposed by the AFEBAT, under the title “Conflict between three cultures. Stone Age, Iron Age and Gunpowder Age”. The brochure that published the restored panel certainly claims that “the painting is recent, from the period of the Matabele invasion around 1830”,

[215] F. Christol (1911: 15).

[216] F. Christol (1930: 74).

[217] Edouard Philippe Emile Cartailhac (1845-1921), one of the first prehistorians, president of the Société archéologique du Midi de la France from 1914 to 1921, was at first opposed to the possibility of prehistoric parietal art before publishing his famous “Mea culpa of a sceptic” (1902) and producing, with the abbé Breuil, a seminal volume devoted to the cave of Altamira. In this book, the introduction of the Ventershoek battle scene, for the purposes of comparison, was very probably his doing, in view of his friendship with Christol (E. Cartailhac & H. Breuil 1906 [1908] ; cf. *supra*).

[218] G. W. Stow & D. Bleek (1930).

[219] B. Woodhouse (n.d.).

[220] B. Woodhouse (n.d.: 24).





and goes on, mixing description with interpretation, to provide a new version of what has indeed become — to use the word employed by Woodhouse — a “narrative”:

«The Blacks, chased from their country by the Whites, run to the mountains to protect their cattle, but these animals are intercepted by Bushmen who are starving to death since their hunting territory has been practically annihilated [...]. One can distinguish three races in the painting: the Bantus, the Bushmen, and the Whites on the right. The Bantus (Zulu or Matabele), painted in black, are armed with assegais and shields and are running to save their cattle, which have probably been stolen; some are wearing loincloths, necklaces and feathers on the head. They are stopped by a volley of arrows. A few Bushmen, wine red in colour, in firing positions, block their passage, bow in hand, quivers full, ceaselessly letting fly their poisoned arrows. Several of the Blacks' assegais have got through this wall of seven little men. Lower down are two yellow men — one of them is wounded and is being looked after. To the left, the herd is driven off by three Bushmen. At the far right are a wagon drawn by oxen, and a couple of Whites recognisable by their clothing»<sup>221</sup>.

This commentary is the only one that evokes the presence of “Whites” and which integrates them into its “narrative”: if the Bushmen (on the left) have raided the cattle of the “Bantus” (in the centre), it is because the “Whites” (to the right) have annihilated the hunting territory of the former. But while this narrative echoes a very widespread view of the history of the peopling of the region, it is only made possible by reducing the chronological depth shown



Fig. 81. Detail of the second panel of Christol Cave. Cf. the recording by the Frobenius expedition, Fig. 49 (Photo JLLQ, February 2004).



Fig. 82. Another detail of the same panel (Photo JLLQ, February 2004).

by the images, and assembling them into the global illustration of a single scene. The series of sequences presented above strongly contradicts this way of looking at the scene.

The only discordant viewpoint in what must henceforth be called an interpretative tradition of this panel comes to us from Jannie Loubser and Gordon Laurens. These two authors, in 1994, published a recording — excellent but partial — of the sheep panel (Fig. 7)<sup>222</sup>, thinking that they could find in it some indications of trance, in the form of fifteen fingermarks<sup>223</sup> and a zigzag snake (Fig. 81), to which they add some fishes moving around a “rain animal” (Fig. 82. and cf. fig. 49). From that basis, they propose a new interpretation, according to which “the ‘battle scenes’ [in general] can best be seen as hallucinatory encounters between opposing parties of medicine people”<sup>224</sup>.

This new approach fits right into a recent fashion<sup>225</sup>, which refuses to read rock art as naturalistic images, or as the expression of mythical

[221] P. Ellenberger (2003: 24).

[222] J. Loubser & G. Laurens (1994, fig. 8).

[223] *Ibid.*: 106.

[224] *Ibid.*: 118.

[225] C. Campbell also belongs to this fashion, since he interprets in this way a Steepside painting “that appears to be a realistic portrayal of a cattle raid”. But just as at Christol Cave, nothing proves that “San raiders” are depicted here (C. Campbell 1986 : 261, and fig. 3).





thoughts, but only as graphic metaphors associated with what the authors call “shamanism”. Hence, in the “contact scenes”, the people carrying shields of Sotho type should no longer be understood as actual depictions of Sotho warriors, because the San could have obtained these shields from their neighbours, in order to make symbolic use of them: “San medicine people tranced and painted domestic ungulates and shields to regulate changing relations within their own society”<sup>226</sup>. Hypotheses of this kind, in which every figure, every person, every animal, every object, may become a “metaphor” at the interpreter’s whim, have trouble finding any confirmation in the facts, and rarely go beyond the stage of well intentioned speculation<sup>227</sup>, as is recognised by certain of their proponents. Hence, after having tried to demonstrate that “The paintings of shields should be seen in terms of trance experiences”<sup>228</sup>, J. Loubser and G. Laurens end up by admitting that “owing to the paucity of ethnographic material on shields, however, our inferences about their significance among the San of the Caledon Valley must remain speculative”<sup>229</sup>. This prudence is very healthy, and yet it must not prevent us from pursuing the investigation of this ethnographic material, which we shall do below.

Apart from this last, metaphorical reading of the panel, which forces one to have recourse to a largely hypothetical imaginary and symbolic universe<sup>230</sup>, all the interpretations of it therefore propose a historicist reading and are in keeping with the paradigm of “contact” (in its agonistic form) between groups. Let’s have a look here at the epistemological presuppositions of such a reading, starting with the interpretation proposed by Paul Ellenberger.

First of all it should be noted that, in the fresco, nothing enables one objectively to claim that Blacks were “chased from their country by the Whites”. Such an interpretation does not take into account the fact that the “battle scene” and the “wagons” are not by the same hand, and that decades probably separate these works, as we established above. Nor does anything on the wall show that the Blacks “run to the mountains to protect their cattle”, let alone that they do this to “save their cattle, which have probably been stolen”. And finally nothing indicates that Bushmen “starving to death” have “intercepted” these cattle. Similarly, against the standard interpretation of the panel, one can assert that nothing in the image evokes this cattle raid that is supposed to have occurred immediately before the episode being shown to us: that of a pursuit in retaliation.

In short, all the historicist interpretations proposed for this battle scene presuppose the existence of an earlier episode, which we cannot see but which is present in our minds: the actual raid. This is what one might call the “comic strip principle”: our image follows an earlier illustration, on an already turned page, and cannot be understood except in relation to it. It must exist — but it is unnecessary to see it — to give meaning to what we actually have in front of our eyes. Without this hidden image, we would have nothing before us but a group of little red men protecting cattle against the aggression of a group of “big Blacks” — a minimal reading which makes no presupposition that the latter are trying to recuperate “their” animals.

The problem is that this missing image does not exist — neither in the line of shelters at Ventershoek nor on the other panels showing

[226] J. Loubser & G. Laurens (1994: 118).

[227] The intention here being to overturn the view that the Bushmen endured “contact” passively, and promote the idea that on the contrary they provoked, or even controlled (S. Hall 1994: 62).

[228] J. Loubser & G. Laurens (1994).

[229] Ibid. (1994: 115).

[230] On the other hand, it seems that one can go along with the authors when they demonstrate that some of the depictions of domestic cattle prolonged the tradition of eland figures, by integrating the new animals into an old symbolic constellation. C. Campbell (1987: 76) ; S. Hall (1994: 75 and fig. 4); S. Ouzman (2003: 7).





similar cattle raids, even though they are numerous in the region<sup>231</sup>. Should one believe that the authors of these images enjoyed always depicting the second act of a drama, whose first act was sufficiently well known to the contemporary spectators as to not deserve being drawn? Or must one think that it is the present-day spectator who has felt permitted to correct the drama's plot by assuming the existence of an act played out in the wings?

Of course, these two options are not a matter for indifference. One might even say that the choice made by most commentators of this image and of all the similar panels has particular repercussions in South Africa. It certainly fits into a linear, evolutionist reading of history, which requires the existence of different populations which must necessarily oppose each other, become allies, follow each other.... In this context, such a panel is immediately read as depicting different "races": little men armed with a bow, and thus Bushmen, and thus nomadic hunter-gatherers, are facing up to big Blacks armed with assegais and shields, and thus sedentary herders. The ensemble will consequently be interpreted as a cattle raid on the latter by the former, by virtue of a widely shared *a priori*. Hence, in the very first article in the series that Peter Becker would devote at the end of the 1960s to the "Peoples of Southern Africa"<sup>232</sup>, in the widely read newspaper *The Star*, this author reproduces a rock painting (or a detail) showing a bovine between two Bushmen (**Fig. 83**) with the following caption: "This rock painting discovered in the Northern Cape depicts two Bushmen driving a beast presumably stolen from a White farmer or tribesman in the area"<sup>233</sup>. This com-

mentary, which Becker does not justify with any argument, bears witness to the widespread view that every Bushman must always be "presumed" guilty of any pillage, theft or raid of cattle, which he can in no case ever possess in his own right.

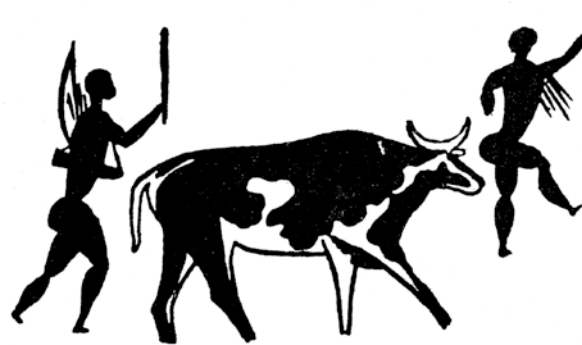


Fig. 83. Rock engraving (or detail) of South Africa, described by Peter Becker, at the end of the 1960s, as depicting "two Bushmen taking away a beast that has probably been stolen from a White farmer or from a native (tribesman) of the region".

These keys to reading made the image an "ideal" scene, suitable for placing in manuals to illustrate this type of encounter, as much for the transition from Mesolithic to Neolithic in Europe as for any "contact" between nomadic hunter-gatherers and sedentary herders in Africa. Hence its fame, and its status as the illustration *par excellence* of a universal historic event, highlighted by so many authors. Significantly, even in 1994, its recording by Guillaume constituted the only rock art image chosen to illustrate Bushman art in the history of South Africa published by John D. Omer Cooper<sup>234</sup>.

[231] Between the Caledon and Orange, S. Ouzman lists 73 paintings of "stock raids", 102 showing "inter-group conflict" in which the Bushmen are losing the fight, and at least 60 in which they are winning (2003: 10-11).

[232] Articles collected together in P. Becker (1971).

[233] Our emphasis.

[234] J. G. Omer Cooper (1994: 3).





Previously, the same image had also been called on as an example to illustrate comparisons between rock arts in different regions, most notably by Hugo Obermaier and Herbert Kühn in their study of the recordings made by Reinhard Maack in the Brandberg<sup>235</sup>. It was even cited as an example by the most famous prehistorian of his time, the abbé Breuil, in the form of a childhood memory. Late in life, here is what he wrote:

«When in my early youth, like every student of Prehistory, I studied Emile Cartailhac's *La France Préhistorique*, I remember being deeply impressed by a copy of a Bushman painting at Ventershoek, near Wepener, Orange Free State. This copy had been made by the French Protestant missionary Pasteur Christol, a former pupil of the Beaux-Arts and a friend of Cartailhac since his childhood, and has since been reproduced in all textbooks on Ethnography and Primitive Art»<sup>236</sup>.

A defective memory, of course, since, although Breuil has perhaps not forgotten that he himself made a recording almost thirty years earlier, it is not among the 162 engravings illustrating Cartailhac's *La France Préhistorique* that one encounters the famous battle scene of Ventershoek, but rather in the book jointly written by Cartailhac and Breuil about the cave of Altamira... !

An antedated memory, therefore, which has the effect of giving the canonical interpretation of the Ventershoek "battle scene", as of all similar scenes, a longer genealogy and a significance that is valid a fortiori, not only for a corner of Africa, but also for "our" (i.e. European) prehistory.



[235] H. Obermaier & H. Kühn (1930, fig. 8).

[236] H. Breuil (1955: 1). This passage seems to be a more-or-less faithful English translation of an extract, cited above, from the abbé's autobiography. About the work of Breuil on rock art in southern Africa, see Le Quellec (2010-a, 2010-b).





## 10

### The image itself, at last...

This panel has never been really described, because it has always been, above all, interpreted. Hence, this image's use as an example has ended up by making it extremely muddled and, paradoxically, in large part invisible. This is why we would now like to propose a "flat" reading, that starts completely from scratch. Since certain parts are totally lost, it is therefore necessary to have recourse to the old recordings, even though we know that they present some notable differences among themselves. In the absence of the original, it is henceforth impossible to verify their degree of veracity<sup>[237]</sup>. The only solution consists of attempting a virtual reconstruction, a kind of "virtual" panel that takes into account all the available documentation (recordings, copies, descriptions, removals, early and modern photos), by following a method which is to rock art studies what *Quellenforschung* is to Philology. We are well aware of the fact that we are proposing to produce in this way an "*Ur-Dokument*" which may, perhaps, have never existed. This new document, which can never claim to be perfect, nor definitive — something that is henceforth impossible to achieve — has the aim of presenting the panel as doubtless nobody has ever really seen it. Moreover, in the first section, we shall limit our critical synthesis to the imag-

es located to the left of the vertical flow which caused part of the paintings to disappear.

A preliminary comparison of the available recordings of this fresco reveals to us that sixty subjects (at least) were present in it "at the start", that is to say, at an ideal moment before phase D mentioned above. This count makes it possible to compare all the copies and recordings available to us with this ideal state, and with respect to the number of figures reproduced. The following table, which summarises our observations, shows the free-and-easy way in which this painting was treated by most of those who thought they were giving an account of it. And we have not even included the subjects added after phase D, i.e. more than forty figures!

We proceeded to produce a graphic restoration (**Fig. 84**) which was based firstly on the present state of the wall, which we refrained from touching<sup>[238]</sup>. By combining observations and plans, freehand drawings, photographs of the whole and of details, both of the wall and of the blocks conserved in the museums, we first used the method of tracing from photographs, drawing heavily on the possibilities offered by the *Illustrator*® software developed by Adobe. The use of a big screen makes major enlargements possible (up to 64 times) which facilitates

[237] In accordance with the fragments of the panel that can still be observed (in situ or in the form of detached blocks) one can simply establish a comparison that makes it possible to evaluate the rigour of each recording.

[238] Although still widely used in South Africa, the method of direct tracing is generally condemned by present-day rock art specialists, because of its destructive effects. It should only be used in the case of the imminent and inescapable disappearance of the works (See N. Aujoulat 1993 ; Y. Martin 1993 ; Lorblanchet 1995 : 116-118 ; A. Roussot 1997: 27).



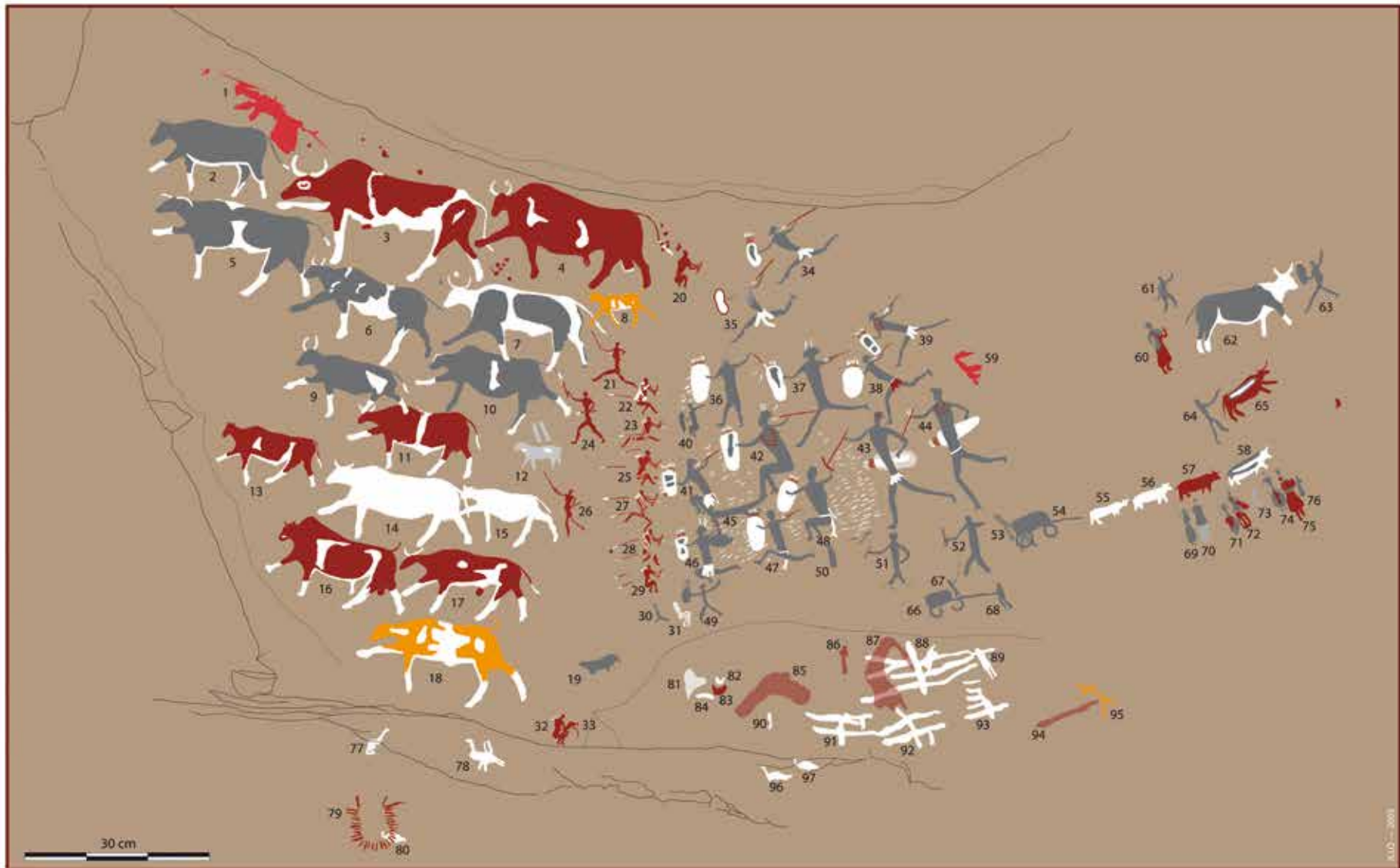


Fig. 84. Idealised restoration of the main panel, taking into account the whole of the available documentation (Computer aided drawing, JLLQ).





assemblages and drawings. For the parts that are not very legible, the treatment of contrasts and saturation, the modification of colour balance and selective correction by colour (Cyan, Magenta, Yellow, Black) by means of *Photoshop*® (also from Adobe) often makes it possible, as a first approach, to greatly improve the reading possibilities. But we also used the *ImageJ* image analyser, developed in the Java language<sup>239</sup>, in association with the *DStretch*® plug-in which was kindly supplied by its creator Jon Harman<sup>240</sup>. This is a system for decorrelation of colours, originally conceived for teledetection, and which this researcher has adapted to the needs of rock art researchers. On certain photos, the result is very impressive (**Fig. 85 and 86**; compare with Breuil's recording **Fig. 45**; or **Fig. 87-88**, compare with Breuil's recording **Fig. 43 and 44**).

After having thus proceeded to recording the present-day wall (**Fig. 6, 74**), the removals that we knew about were virtually restored to their places. The rest of the image was then reconstituted by using the work of the authors who preceded us, on the basis of the principle that, although their recordings are often quite crudely wrong with regard to the respective positions of the subjects, they remain fairly correct for the details that are still verifiable. This is probably due to a method of working shown, among other tracings, by those of Breuil, and which consists of making partial recordings, which are then assembled when the researcher is far from the site and cannot verify the final result in situ. So our final reconstruction (**Fig. 84**) was only possible to the extent that, as far as we can judge from the figures that survive (on the wall or on the detached blocks),



Fig. 85. Close-up photo of the motif traced by Breuil in Fig. 45 (Photo JLLQ, April 2006).



Fig. 86. The same photo, treated with DStretch software associated with the ImageJ plug-in. Compare with the recording by Breuil, Fig. 45. This motif represents a fringed female apron, which is of great importance during the female initiation ceremonies of Khoekhoe groups



Fig. 87. Series of small anthropomorphs located to the west of Christol Cave (Photo Thomas Dowson, RARI, No. RSA-VEN1-2).



Fig. 88. The same photo, treated with DStretch and ImageJ. Compare with the recording by Breuil, Fig. 43 and 44 (Photo Thomas Dowson, RARI, No. RSA-VEN1-2).

the recordings available to us of the missing parts are fairly faithful on the whole. Their principal errors consist of an often erroneous layout of the figures with respect to each other, and the forgetting of certain protagonists in the scene, humans or animals. On the other

[239] The software is free and can be downloaded at: <http://rsb.info.nih.gov/ij/>

[240] See J. Harman (2005). Profound thanks to this researcher, who freely distributes the results of his work to anyone interested (cf. <http://www.dstretch.com/>).





hand, each figure noted is pretty correct in its details. This is especially the case in Christol's recordings, which leads one to think that they are the result of the assembling of detailed recordings for each figure, copied separately and then brought together on a fairly approximate sketch of the whole panel. It was in this last stage that the most flagrant errors crept in (the forgetting of certain figures, incorrect positioning of several of them...). However, other problems can arise: poor detection of certain details on some animal subjects (shape of the horns, presence of udders...) and some humans (body decoration, loincloths...), which we have had to take into account. When a detail of this kind has been seen by several authors, we have adopted it systematically, in a procedure akin to the *Quellenforschung* of the philologists, but we have also accepted certain features that are henceforth impossible to verify as a whole, especially the body decoration of the Bushmen, only noted by Stow, but still verifiable thanks to the vestiges that survive today in places, and thanks to the treatment of the images by computer. In one case, we had to make an arbitrary choice: the double headband worn by one of the people in the group of "big Blacks" is white according to Stow, red on one of Christol's copies, non-existent on the others, and invisible to the naked eye today. In this specific case, we preferred to have faith in Christol because, after treatment of our photograph with *DStretch*, a light red line can still be discerned at this spot. Where the two running warriors removed at the top of the group are concerned, it is Stow who has been favoured, but we used the tracings by Paul Ellenberger to correct the drawing of the people in European

dress. Having more faith in Stow than in other visitors to the site, we have retained person No. 34 which was suppressed by Victor and Paul Ellenberger. Conversely, only Paul Ellenberger recognized the addition of the small person No. 40 within the group of "big Blacks", and attributed to him a shield of the colour of recent sheep No. 12. The digital manipulation of the images and the close examination, using strong contrast, of the old photographs of the wetted wall (we had at our disposal those taken by the Frobenius team, van Riet Lowe, Paul Ellenberger, Neil Lee), show that this person does exist, but is practically invisible on the wall today. It is probable that the relatively bad quality of the "paint pot" used to make these images served them badly, and that they could not stand up to the successive wettings.

Although we want to do our utmost to reduce the possibilities for error, our aim here was not to produce the facsimile of a vanished original, and we fully accept the fact that a recording is always, to some degree, personal. Moreover, the notion of a "perfect restoration" has been abandoned by current rock art researchers, because "recordings of works of art by drawing [...] only render reality through the filter of a foreign hand"<sup>241</sup>. Nevertheless, this inevitable fault is precisely what gives a recording all its value, since it differs from a copy through its analytical and interpretative character<sup>242</sup>. The aim of this work is to "go beyond the immediate aspect of a work of art"<sup>243</sup> to penetrate it deeply, and here we follow the opinion of Denis Vialou, for whom "the objective of a study of parietal art is not first and foremost to reproduce: it is to provide the means for a better understanding"<sup>244</sup>.

[241] A. Leroi-Gourhan (1965a: 240).

[242] M. Lorblanchet (1993: 336).

[243] M. Lorblanchet (1993: 335).

[244] D. Vialou (1986: 21-22).





	S	C-1884	C-1911	CCP	CG	D	F	BLM	E-1	E-2	E-3	
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	3
3	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
4	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
5	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	8
6	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
7	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11
8	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11
9	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	7
10	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11
11	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	9
12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
13	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	8
14	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	10
15	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11
16	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	9
17	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	10
18	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	8
19	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
20	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11
21	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11
22	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11
23	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11
24	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11
25	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11
26	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11
27	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11
28	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
29	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
31	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
32	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
34	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	10
35	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
36	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
37	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11
38	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11
39	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	8
40	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
41	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11
42	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
43	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
44	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	8
45	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
46	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
47	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
48	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
49	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	3
50	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
51	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	3
52	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
53	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
54	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
55	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
56	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
57	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
58	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
59	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
60	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
61	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
62	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
63	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
64	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
65	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
66	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
67	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
68	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
69	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
70	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
71	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
72	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
73	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
74	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
75	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
76	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
40	36	36	20	32	34	32	34	37	47	72		

Caption of the table:

S: Stow.

C-1884: Christol 1884 (watercolour in the Museum of Neuchâtel).

C-1911: Christol 1911.

CCP: Postcard by Christol.

CG: Drawing by C. Guillaume.

D: Dieterlen.

F: Frobenius.

BLM: Museum of Bloemfontein.

E-1: Victor Ellenberger at the Masitise Cave House.

E-2: Ellenberger at the Musée de l'Homme and then at the Masitise Cave House.

E-3: Paul Ellenberger 2003 (complementary details in the text).

Symbols used:

1: occurs on the recording,

0: does not occur on the recording. The bottom line gives the number of subjects per recording, the column at right the number of researchers who recorded a subject.

In yellow: subjects recorded by all researchers.





## 11

## Return to the heart of the battle

Equipped with this tool, and on our guard against a certain number of interpretative temptations, let's therefore return to settle down in front of our battle scene, concentrating on the images of phase B, as mentioned above (**Fig. 67**). They almost totally fill a big, smooth, slightly concave panel that seems to be closed in on all sides — above by a rocky overhang, elsewhere by angles in the wall. The most remarkable element — that which, at any rate, is most obvious on first viewing — is its construction, built on a layout in five groups of subjects (**Fig. 89**). The latter are, from left to right: a herd comprising sixteen bovines and their three herders, six archers in a line with another above and two other people of the same type at the bottom, a group of fourteen big black warriors (including the one stretched out on the ground), a bovine framed by two black warriors at far right. Each subject is clearly participating in a single action: the bovines are all moving in the same direction (towards the left), driven by the herders, who are themselves protected by the archers (turned to the right), who are attacked by warriors turned towards them (that is, towards the left). The scene, clearly conceived as a coherent whole, is thus read from right to left. The only contrary indication (well noted

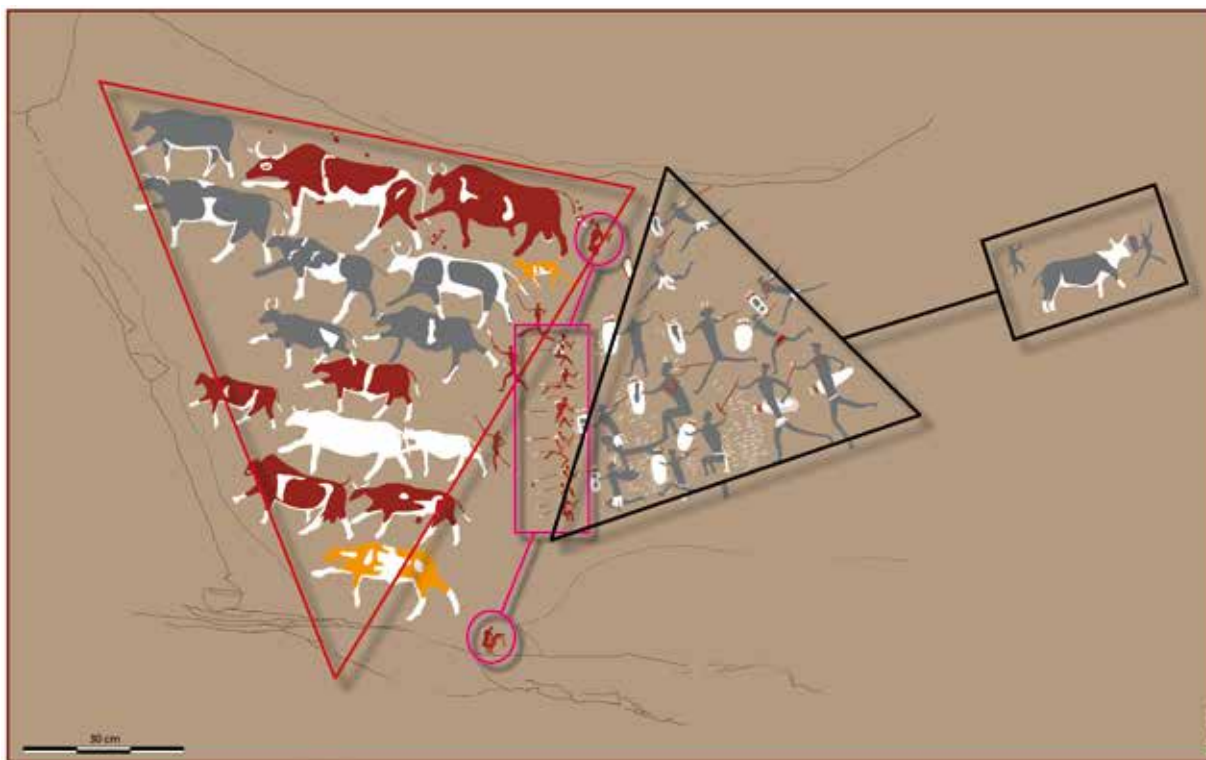


Fig. 89. Organisation of the main panel during phase B. The two major assemblages, in which all protagonists are heading to the left, are on the one hand the group of bovines accompanied by their herders, and on the other that of the big black warriors; each of these two assemblages forms a triangle, the first with point downward, the second upward. Between the two is the line of small red archers, linked to another archer isolated above, and to two people of the same type below; all of these people are turned to the right. At far right an isolated bovine facing right is framed by two of the black warriors, with this little group being linked to the assemblage of these (Computer aided drawing, JLLQ).





in the Ellenberger recordings) is to be found in the isolated bovine, apparently of the same style as the first, but which is heading towards the right<sup>245</sup>, between two big black people<sup>246</sup> (or more probably three<sup>247</sup>) which seem to be leading it with grand gestures. Although these last three figures are quite far from the main ensemble (on the other side of the flow), and go against the general movement, they must be linked to it on the basis of style: apart from its orientation, nothing distinguishes this isolated bovine from all the other animals on the panel with black and white hides<sup>248</sup> (**Fig. 75**) and the men looking after it are similar to those in the group of big Blacks (except that here the shield is totally black, and not white or black and white; but this was already the case with that of the big Black stretched out on the ground, in the group facing the archers<sup>249</sup>).

We should add that careful observation confirms that these figures were made by a “single hand”: both in stylistic terms — including the repetition of the same motifs, even if very inconspicuous — and in the four colours used, which are always exactly the same on whatever part of the panel they occur: white, black, ochre (sienna) and yellow<sup>250</sup>. Finally, even taking into account the differential weathering of the panel (better preserved on the left than on the right), the additions are easily detectable. This observation justifies our attempt at a global analysis of the principal work, and we shall see that in return the description of the stylistic traits and the organisation reinforce the idea of a conception of the whole operated by the “single hand”, or in any case the same idea served by the same know-how. The stiff people added at the bottom are very different, as are the wagons and the

“lumpish” animals pulling them, the people of European appearance<sup>251</sup>, and finally the finger-markings<sup>252</sup> placed on a small relief below the main scene, which do not appear on any recording, and which have not been mentioned by any commentator<sup>253</sup>. Made in different styles, using another technique, none of these subjects is integrated into the battle scene; they are clearly later, as is shown by their location on its periphery, and we shall not take them into account in this analysis, and the same goes for the ostriches or other white birds<sup>254</sup> drawn with the finger and, for the moment, the red geometric motif that is set back a little at lower left<sup>255</sup>. One can simply observe, since we shall not return to this subject, that the “European” appearance of the figures at bottom right of the panel is not necessarily an argument in favour of their ethnic identification as Europeans: many other hybrid or more or less Europeanised groups may have been depicted here in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We should also point out that, although the clothing of figures 60 and 69 to 76, as well as the elements relating to harnessing (wagon No. 54 behind a line of oxen pulling it, whip of person No. 67) are easily identifiable as belonging to European material culture, a number of elements of this material culture are curiously absent — for example horses and associated objects (saddle, stirrups, reins, spurs), firearms and postures (shouldered arms, firing position), objects (powder horns), pictorial motifs (lines showing the trajectory of projectiles), or other elements of the equipment (pipe, hat, boots) generally associated (in whole or in part) with the presence of White colonists in the rock paintings of South Africa<sup>256</sup>. Particularly striking in this regard is the absence of the horse, the

[245] No. 62 (Fig. 84); its pale silhouette can still be made out on the wall.

[246] Nos. 61 and 63 (Fig. 84)

[247] If one adds No. 64 to the two previous ones (Fig. 84).

[248] Nos. 2, 5-7, 9, 10 (Fig. 84).

[249] No. 45 (Fig. 84).

[250] This needs to be confirmed by analysis of the components of the “paint pot” (pigment, binder, extender).

[251] Nos. 60, and 69 to 76 (Fig. 84).

[252] Nos. 81 à 95 (Fig. 84).

[253] This absence from the recordings by Stow and Christol might suggest that the markings could postdate them; however, quadruped No. 19 (Fig. 84) has had its head amputated thanks to the removals carried out under the aegis of Christol... So it is possible to think that, as we suggested earlier, this animal may have been added between the recording and the removal.

[254] Nos. 77, 78, 80, 96, 97 (Fig. 84).

[255] No. 79 (Fig. 84).

[256] See for example J. B. Wright (1971, pl. Opposite p. 71 and 151), P. Vinnicombe (1976, fig. 12 to 15c, 24-25, 41 and passim), R. Yates et al. (1993), J. Parkington (2003 : 112-119), J. Wright & A. Mazel (2007 : 88-95).





indispensable means of transport for the men leading commandos or columns of migrants. Moreover, others besides ourselves have noticed that in the North-Eastern Cape and the Southern Orange Free State, the paintings of cattle are often associated with what seem to be scenes of conflict in which one of the groups of antagonists is carrying Sotho hourglass-shaped shields, but that horses are remarkably absent from these depictions<sup>257</sup> although it was possible to see some in certain hunter-gatherer camps in this zone by 1809<sup>258</sup>.

Finally, we should add that the wagons, although certainly depicted in a schematic way, nevertheless appear to be of a kind different from the farm- or trek-wagons used by the Afrikaner farmers in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and frequently represented on walls in the zones of colonial advance. The wagons we are presented with here are very small (in comparison with the oxen and the figure with the whip), apparently light — one is pulled by four oxen, or four pairs of oxen (if one assumes that the outlines of oxen that can be seen in the image are masking animals yoked in parallel and invisible in the picture), a much lower number than the twelve to twenty animals needed to pull those true *terra firma* “vessels”, the Boer wagons, capable of carrying between two and four tons (**Fig. 90**). When these factors are added to the absence of horses and the other usual signs of the colonist’s power, one is rather led to see this as a light convoy of a small itinerant trader. Certain sections of African societies, for example the Xhosa peasant elites or Christianised Mfengu/tingo, had — since perhaps the 1830s and certainly since the 1850s — made a speciality out of this activity in the eastern part of the Cape colony

and the neighbouring regions, and had a quasi monopoly here until freight transport by rail was imposed, in the final decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>259</sup>. However, let us be prudent: apart from this slender cluster of clues and the presence nearby of a crossing point over the Caledon, nothing permits us to document our hypothesis with any precision.

So let’s return to the organisation of the whole of the picture (**Fig. 89**). This can be seen particularly well if one considers the placing of each group of figures and the relative position of the figures in each of them.

The herd, as we have said, comprises sixteen subjects<sup>260</sup>, which can be divided into four groups on the basis of hide-colour: black and white (six animals), red and white (six), yellow and white (two), white (two). In embellishing his work with anatomical details, the artist has emphasised among these animals the presence of bulls<sup>261</sup>, cows<sup>262</sup> and calves or heifers<sup>263</sup>. It remains more difficult to draw definite conclusions about the sex or maturity of about half of them<sup>264</sup>, but comparison with the sexed individuals argues in favour of heifers or non-suckling cows, although the depiction of bullocks is not entirely ruled out for certain figures. Whatever these uncertainties, be they deliberate or not, the presence of bulls is only definite in the second of these groups (red-white); cows occur in all of them, but the calves or heifers are only the last two (white and yellow-white).

It therefore seems that the numbers of groups of animals thus defined by their hides correspond to the execution of a coordinated plan, with the two principal groups (black-white and red-white), each made up of six individuals, being accompanied by two minority groups (white and

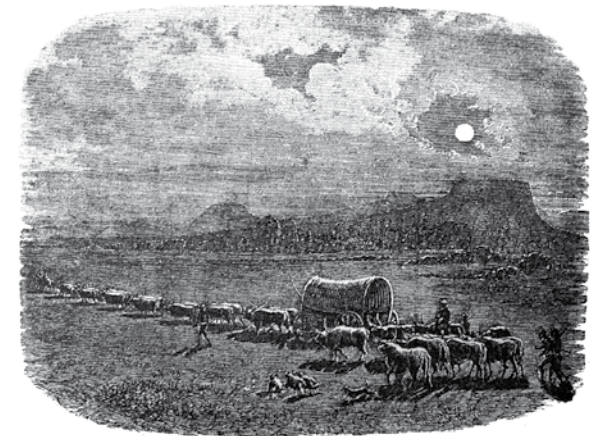


Fig. 90. Example of a Boer cart — compare with those in Figs. 46, 54, 55 and 84 No. 54 and 67 (after Baldwin 1863).

[257] A. Manhire *et al.* (1986 : 24).

[258] D. Moodie (1838 : 42).

[259] C. Bundy (1979) ; G. H. Pirie (1993) ; A. Webster (1995).

[260] We shall return later to animal No. 62, which is isolated from the rest of the herd.

[261] Definitely present because of the indication of the scrotum (Nos. 4 and 16, to which one should perhaps add animal n°17).

[262] With a drawing of an udder with four teats, placed between the hind legs (Nos 10, 11, 14 and 18).

[263] Recognisable from their juvenile appearance: smaller size, absence of horns (Nos 8 and 15).

[264] Fig. 84, Nos. 2, 3, 5-7, 9 and 13.





yellow-white), each represented by a cow and a calf. This observation is reinforced by the spatial distribution of the animals following these same criteria. At first sight, these different groups certainly give the impression of being mixed together, with no particular distribution being apparent. And yet, in reality the ensemble is organised in the form of two downward-pointing triangles: the upper one<sup>265</sup> has the form 3/4-2-1, while the lower one<sup>266</sup> has 3-2-1 (**Fig. 91**).

In each triangle, a group of animals with a certain hide-pattern is framed by the others: black-and-whites framed by red-and-whites and a yellow-and-white above; red-and-whites framed by whites and a yellow-and-white above. One detail underlines the deliberate nature of this construction: the upper left angle of each triangle is occupied by an animal of the framed group, followed by two animals from the framing group, which can be schematised as follows:

	B/W	R/W	R/W	
B/W		B/W	B/W	Y/W
		B/W	B/W	
		R/W		
	R/W	W	W	
	R/W	R/W		
		Y/W		

(B = black, R = red, Y = yellow, W = white)

Taking into account the attention that African herders<sup>267</sup> generally pay to their animals' hide patterns, it is highly probable that a layout of this kind, using the same basic plan for each triangle (**Fig. 92**) owes nothing to chance. Finally, let us point out that, whatever the group in question, beyond the diversity of the hides, hide patterns with a white stripe are the most common.



Fig. 91. Despite its apparent disorder, it seems that the herd in the main panel is organised into two unequal triangles (Computer aided drawing, JLLQ).

Just as with the animals, the distribution of the little ochre people abides by a clear organisation of the whole, with a vertical order in two lines:

— a first line (**Fig. 93**) corresponds to the depiction of three individuals<sup>268</sup> who seem to “touch” three bovines<sup>269</sup>, with an implement (a stick), in order to make them move forward. As it is, these are two black-and-white animals and one white, which is perhaps not insignificant — because this layout of cowherds may be related to that of the groups of animals defined by their hides, as described above. It should be noted that at least two<sup>270</sup> of these “cowherds” are carrying a quiver over the shoulder and that, where

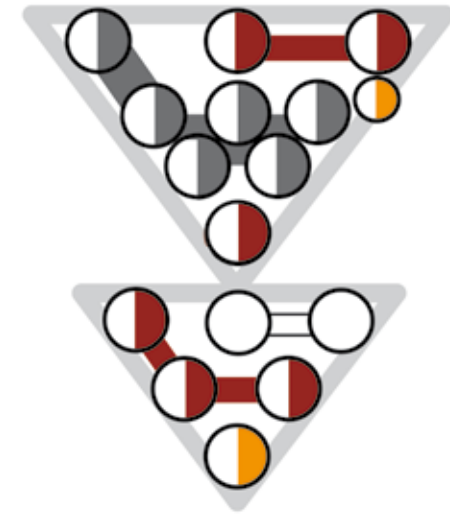


Fig. 92. Diagram showing the general principle that governed the organisation of the same herd: in the centre of each triangle is a group of animals with a certain type of hide, framed by beasts of another kind, but guided by an animal of the same type as themselves (Computer aided drawing, JLLQ).

[265] Made up of animals Nos. 2 to 11.

[266] Made up of animals Nos. 13 to 18.

[267] Cf. Poland *et al.* 2005 (Nguni), Turton 1980 (Mursi), Fukui 1979 (Bodi), Evans-Pritchard 1953 (Nuer), Hazel 1977 (Nuer, Dinka, Atuot, Dassanetch, Turkana, Bodi...), etc.

[268] Nos. 21, 24, 26.

[269] Nos. 7, 10, 15.

[270] Nos. 21, 26.





two of them are concerned, they are holding at waist-level one or two elongated implements<sup>271</sup> equipped with a white armature, like the assegais located just behind them. If Stow is to be believed, subjects 21 and 26 also have (or rather, had) white ornaments which evoke those of the archers.

— a second line (**Fig. 94**) corresponds to the vertical juxtaposition of six archers<sup>272</sup>. The one at the very top of the “column” seems to be wearing a white cape (evoking the skin garment known as a kaross in the historical and ethnographic literature). This is the principal detail which distinguishes him from the others, which are similar, apart from the movement of the legs (see below) and a body decoration (or jewellery) made up of a variable number of white lines (but this may simply be the result of a process of differential preservation). These people are certainly identical to each other: their only attributes are a bow that points somewhat downward, as if they were in the process of arming it, and a quiver of arrows, carried over the shoulder. These six archers are grouped together in order to confront the bulk of the troop of black warriors. Three other people of the same type are symmetrically detached from this group: one above<sup>273</sup>], likewise armed with a bow and confronting two warriors at a distance from the rest, and two others at the bottom, apparently isolated, and perhaps informing revealing the care given to the wounded. The six archers of the principal column have been subjected to a salvo of assegais: about ten of these weapons (brown shaft and white point, identical to those carried by the black warriors) seem to have passed by them and are behind them, forming a vertical line between cowherds and archers, which again

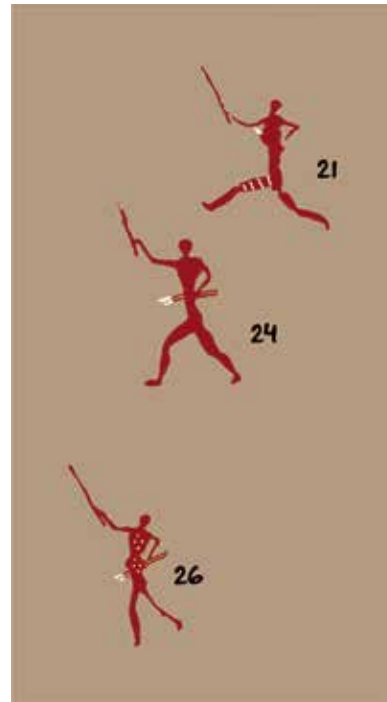


Fig. 93. Detail of the pastoralists guiding the herd. The two at the bottom are both carrying two spears in one hand and a stick in the other, just like the human in fig. 96 (Computer aided drawing, JLLQ).

reinforces the vertical organisation of this part of the panel. If the number of assegais counted is correct (10), it turns out to correspond fairly exactly to the number of warriors (11) located opposite the group of 6 archers (that is, excluding Nos 32 and 33, located above), especially if one subtracts the warrior lying down (No. 45) and the one apparently carrying a weapon other than the assegai (No. 48). Moreover, although it seems that the two “cowherds” at the bottom are clearly carrying two assegais each, it is remarkable that most of these weapons are actual-

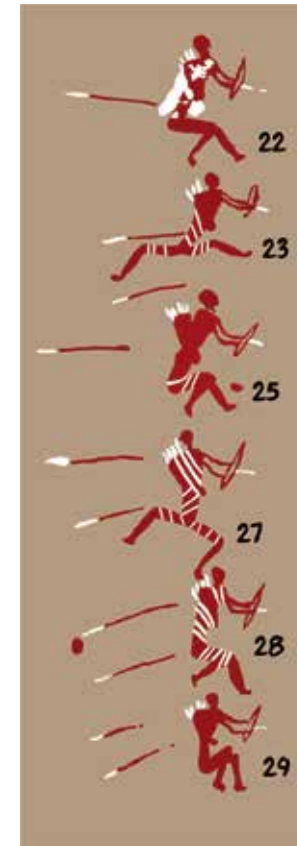


Fig. 94. Detail of the line of archers (Computer aided drawing, JLLQ).

[271] Nos. 24, 26.

[272] Nos 22, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29.

[273] No. 20.





ly grouped two by two behind the four archers at the bottom<sup>274</sup>. Can one therefore suppose that two of the cowherds have been able to pick up some of the assegais thrown at their group? It is possible, especially when one recalls this passage in which G. W. Stow compares the fighting techniques of the Bushmen and of those who in his time were called “Kaffirs”:

«The respective methods of fighting of the Kaffirs and Bushmen differed considerably. The Kaffirs used assagais, which they could not employ with any certain effect at a greater distance than twenty or thirty paces. Of these weapons they did not carry into the field more than three or four<sup>275</sup>, so that they were

soon disarmed in case their antagonists were bold and nimble enough to pick up these weapons as soon as the Kaffirs had hurled them»<sup>276</sup>.

A hypothesis like this about fighting techniques — a hypothesis which may, as we are well aware, be a circular argument, since Stow may have deduced it from what he had seen on the country’s decorated walls — could be reinforced by the presence of a modest image, located in the neighbouring shelter, where another panel shows bovines similar to these, but only surrounded by shield bearers, not archers (**Fig. 11 and 12**). To the right of this group (**Fig. 95**), a little isolated person<sup>277</sup> is

Fig. 95. Photo showing the respective locations of the panel in Figs. 11-12 (big rectangle at left), and of the painting in Fig. 96 (situated in the small rectangle at right) (Photos JLLQ, April 2006).

[274] There are two assagais behind each of the archers Nos. 25, 27, 28 and 29.

[275] In our fresco, a single warrior is carrying four assagais in reserve, four of them have five, four others are holding six, and three have up to seven.

[276] G. W. Stow 1905: 206.

[277] But a removal has caused the disappearance of another painting located in front of it; all that is left of it is what might resemble a quadruped leg (a bovine?).





running with great strides, while clutching two assegais (Fig. 96). The last group of figures, that of the black warriors (Fig. 97), has a spatial layout that apparently corresponds to a far less rigid construction, even though the triangle they form displays a certain symmetry with that of the bovines (Fig. 89): one has the feeling of seeing a troop of thirteen individuals advancing in some disorder — two of them are detached towards the top, while the others form a fairly compact mass. To this number one should add a person stretched out on the ground (wounded or killed?)<sup>278</sup>.

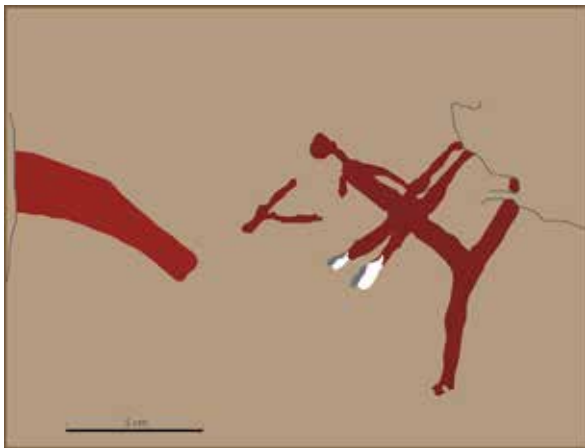


Fig. 96. Small anthropomorph holding in one hand a pair of spears with well marked points, and, in the other, a stick. In front of him there was another painting (bovine?) that has been almost entirely destroyed by rainflow (Computer aided drawing, JLLQ).

In reality, once again, a certain amount of organisation can be detected, which sets the static individuals against those who are moving. The most static is naturally the person stretched out on the ground, around whom three others seem to be suspended in the air in a seated position<sup>279</sup>.

Above, a fifth<sup>280</sup> seems to be walking cautiously or to have stopped prudently, whereas all the others are running to the left with more or less great strides. Hence, the postures they adopt depict a rapid walk or running — depending on how far they are from the combat zone, that is, from the line of archers — or a crouching position on contact with the latter. The whole thing gives the impression of describing warriors running to the assistance of their comrades who are crouching in the front line...

All these individuals have a very pronounced “family likeness”, because they are all painted in black flatwash and the modelling of their torso and limbs is similar. Yet, through a subtle execution, concerning both movement, weaponry (projectiles, shields) and six categories of attributes (feather on the head, headband, necklaces, belt, loincloth, forked false tail), each of them corresponding to a fairly simple typology, the artist took pains so that none of them are perfectly identical. The shields, in particular, vary in shape (oval, kidney-shaped<sup>281</sup>, waisted oval) as well as decoration (totally white, white with red edging, or with one or two dark patches...) To this we should add one “individual” peculiarity: that of the “boomerang” brandished by one of the warriors<sup>282</sup> whereas all the others are armed with an assegai. This “individualisation” of the black warriors contrasts with the relative homogeneity of treatment of the ochre people, evoked above.

Arrows (represented by little white lines) surround several of these individuals. Their distribution follows that of the people (being grouped in front of five of the<sup>283</sup>), just as the assegais followed that of the archers: so it is the layout of the targets and not that of the firers

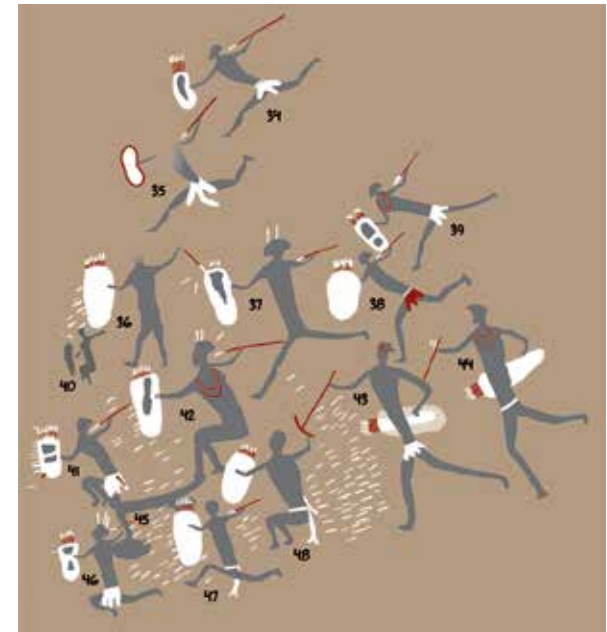


Fig. 97. Detail of the group of “big black warriors” (Computer aided drawing, JLLQ).

[278] No. 45.

[279] Nos. 41, 42, 48.

[280] No. 36.

[281] Kidney-shaped, as in the case of the shields carried by individuals Nos. 33 and 34.

[282] No. 48.

[283] Nos. 36, 42, 43, 47, 48.





which seems to dictate that of the projectiles, in accordance with a graphic utilisation of space linked to intellectual realism (in which one represents what one knows to exist, and not what one really sees).

This leads us to propose an analysis of the conception of space utilised in this panel, paying particular attention to the proportions of the subjects in relation to each other. The care with which the real relative sizes may be respected (for example, among the bovines) merely underlines how the infringements that arise are probably the result of deliberate choice: the bovines are, as we just said, all correctly sized in relation to each other; this also applies to the men in ochre flatwash (archers and cowherds), who are also well proportioned in relation to the cattle (being Bushmen, or let's say Khoisan in the broad sense); conversely, the black warriors have totally unrealistic sizes in relation to each other, but even less credible proportions in relation to the brown men and the cattle.

Can one put these disproportions, or at least some of them, down to a treatment of perspective — the biggest subjects being in the foreground and the farthest ones being smaller? Although this satisfies our own habits in reading images, such a proposition does not hold water: some of the farthest bovines are the biggest<sup>284</sup>, and the little ochre people are more or less all the same size, no matter where they are. Besides, the subjects are generally depicted in such a way as to avoid all interference between themselves, as if each of them were in a “bubble” having no contact with the others, except where the bovines are concerned. Among the figures of the latter, there are several noteworthy superimpositions: a foreleg of the yellow-and-white calf<sup>285</sup> passes in front of the

tail of the animal that precedes it<sup>286</sup>, which itself has two hooves on top of the animal located just below<sup>287</sup>, even though this one seems nearer... A layout like this goes against our reading habits. Similarly, the hindquarters of a black-and-white bovine<sup>288</sup> are partially superimposed on a red-and-white cow<sup>289</sup> although we “feel” that the latter is closer to us. The only example of a possible treatment of perspective that corresponds to our own artistic canons is provided by the head of a white-and-black animal<sup>290</sup> that is passing in front of the hindleg of another, which appears farther away<sup>291</sup>... but is this really deliberate? Everything looks in fact as if each element of the scene was painted separately, independently and in profile, but placed together in plan, as seen from above. Under these conditions, the subjects' respective sizes can in no way be linked to their position in space, but have other values (such as power, importance, etc). One can find a confirmation of this hypothesis in the fact that the stature of the “big Blacks” was generally exaggerated in relation to the size of the “little” Bushmen, which was distinctly minimised. This observation becomes all the more significant if one accepts that this way of seeing, this method of depicting oneself in confrontation with the other, is indeed that of a Bushman artist.

Many elements make it possible to stress the fact that the use of colour plays a full role in the panel's narrative dimension. The two rival groups are in opposition particularly through their dominant colour, and it is this which, together with their position, enables one to associate the cowherds with the group of Bushmen. Even though a host of details confirm this opposition, it is colour which is the basic source of information here. Therefore, and even if its

[284] Nos. 3 and 4.

[285] No. 8.

[286] No. 7.

[287] No. 10.

[288] No. 9.

[289] No. 11.

[290] No. 6.

[291] No. 5.





exact meaning escapes us, it is perhaps through deliberate choice that the group of bovines brings together and arranges animals whose hides — red-and-white or black-and-white — reproduce the colours that contribute, like their weapons, to the opposition of the protagonists. Maybe it is in light of this observation that the presence of bulls in one group and not in the other, and the necessity for cowherds to place themselves behind certain animals and not the others, find part of their meaning.

The depiction of movement also seems to obey very codified rules, in accordance with a fairly limited register of positions:

— In the first place, all the bovines are depicted with a highly stereotyped arrangement of the legs, representing a single way of showing their steps. That gives this group an “unrealistic” touch (Breuil spoke of “lumpish” animals), as all the animals are making the same movement, albeit one that is not very realistic anatomically (**Fig. 75**). In fact, it is a walk for the hindlegs (anatomically accurate) and a more improbable position for the forelegs: one of them vertical or slightly pointing back, the other projecting forwards, sometimes very high<sup>292</sup>. This treatment of movement appears to be a stylistic trait, a convention that is easily identifiable and reproducible, and which can be recognised, for example, in the same site on the sheep panel (**Fig. 7**), but also on at least one other “cattle raid” scene in the same region<sup>293</sup>. Elsewhere, this same artist’s “trick” was sometimes used to paint other herds<sup>294</sup> and — albeit rarely — to represent elands<sup>295</sup>. The risk in such a technique is that of ending up with monotonous depictions, as occurs when all the bovines on the panel are done with the same

colours and sizes. In this case the only animal that can be distinguished is the one that we thought to be a sheep, which indirectly confirms this identification (**Fig. 74, No. 12**)<sup>296</sup>. However, uniformity is avoided thanks to the use of colour to depict the hide patterns, and through the variability of secondary characteristics: horn shapes or lack of horns, horn profile, tail movement, indication of the navel, the sex or the udders...

— So now, what about the movements and postures of the humans? Whether it be the group of small people in ochre flatwash (cowherds and archers) or the big black warriors, the first impression is that each subject adopts a different position, contrary to the bovines whose movements are very homogeneous. In reality, here again, specific conventions seem to have prevailed. Let’s first remember that, for the black people, a first group of positions seems to reconstruct the different stages of running (in reality, from walking to running with big strides): in all cases, the shape of the legs is that of an inverted V, of differing sizes; a second group comprises stationary individuals, in a seated position (“suspended”) or crouching<sup>297</sup>, or even with one knee on the ground<sup>298</sup>. Since the “cowherds” also display an attitude of rapid walking or running, one can in a similar way divide the archers’ postures into two groups: extended individuals (in a posture that cannot be running — with legs and feet at full stretch — but rather jumping), and flexed individuals, albeit distinct from the flexion of the black humans. These two postures give the strong impression that the archers are not moving away at all, but are forming a bastion in the face of the advance of the black warriors. The latter, on the other hand, are indeed in collective pursuit

[292] The position of Nos. 3 and 5 seems particularly improbable.

[293] S. Ouzman (2003, fig. 6). It is also found in the illustration given by Peter Becker (Fig. 83).

[294] S. Hall (1994, fig. 7) gives an example at Brakfontein in the Winterberg (Eastern Cape). See also J. Rudner & I. Rudner (1970, pl. 56: at Palinkloof, Cradock District; and 56: at Buffelsfontein, Wodehouse District).

[295] P. Vinnicombe (1976, fig. 67, 88 above), 148.

[296] No. 12 — we have already mentioned that it clearly looks more recent than the paintings in the “principal” scene.

[297] Nos. 41, 42, 48.

[298] This is the case with No. 46.





(the graphic analysis confirms first impressions here) and their postures illustrate two tempos: that of running and throwing assegais; and being stationary in order to ward off the volleys of arrows. There are likewise two tempos among the archers, but they are rigorously symmetrical: the stationary, which perhaps corresponds to the firing of arrows; and dodging. The positions of the arms, which are likewise in movement, are even more stereotyped: the three cowherds adopt the same position for both arms; the seven archers use both arms to load their bows; the great majority of the black warriors are brandishing an assegai with one arm, while the other arm, half-bent, holds a shield that is sometimes held far in front of the body<sup>299</sup>, as if to increase the cone of protection (it should be noted that two of the warriors who are farthest from the heart of the battle are not bothering to protect themselves<sup>300</sup>); the arms of the shield bearers are often in an almost symmetrical position, W-shaped, which accentuates even more the visual contrast between this group and that of the archers.

Hence, the treatment of movement, which the artist has obviously executed very carefully, seems to follow very codified rules according to the groups and the type of gestures being performed. We are being shown a pantomime art.

All the above descriptions underline a very remarkable fact: the concern with detail. It is also an art of the miniature in which the greatest attention is given to anatomical details, to jewellery, accessories. On the bovines the artist has also noted hooves and their claw, the hairs of the penis sheath of two bulls, the tuft on the tail or the four teats of the cows. On the big black people one can observe — apart from a fairly accurate depiction of the legs — as the case may

be, necklaces of beads, headbands or belts, all very subtle details which have now most often disappeared, like the white lines noted by Stow in his recording of the Bushmen.

James Walton, who arrived in Lesotho in 1947, also visited Christol Cave and, as an archaeologist as well as an excellent draughtsman<sup>301</sup>, published a detailed analysis of the technique used by the painter:

«A further aspect of cave-painting technique is revealed by the well-known “cattle raid” scene from the cave at Mountain View (Ventershoek), Wepener, and from numerous contemporaneous paintings in Basutoland itself. In this painting Bushmen, with bows and quivers of arrows, are depicted defending themselves against black Nguni warriors armed with spears. In every case the artist first painted a human figure and then proceeded to add clothing and accoutrements. The Zulu warrior was first painted as a nude black figure carrying a white shield. Black decoration was then added to the shield and a white skirt was painted over the warrior’s loins. Finally the white-tipped red spears were painted [...] The same treatment is apparent where only one colour was employed, as in the case of the defending Bushmen bowmen. A nude figure was painted first in reddish-brown ocre and the quiver was then painted over. As a result, where the quiver crosses the body it is of a deeper shade due to the two coats of colour applied. Consequently, the quiver is clearly delineated where it crosses the body, although it is painted in the same colour»<sup>302</sup>.

In the absence of published corpuses, it is scarcely possible to proceed to comparisons between the battle scene that we have just analysed

[299] One extreme case is that of No. 42.

[300] Nos. 43 and 44.

[301] On Walton, see the obituary published by the Society of Antiquaries of London (<http://www.sal.org.uk/obituaries/Obituary%20archive/james-walton>; consulted on 29 May 2008).

[302] J. Walton (1953: 19-20).





Fig. 98. Rock painting on the right bank of the Orange, the general organisation of which is very similar to that of the main panel in Christol Cave, with at left a herd of bovines moving to the left, and on the right a very dynamic assemblage of warriors equipped with "hourglass-shaped" shields; between these two assemblages there is a vertical line of Bushmen archers equipped with quivers over the shoulder and pointing their arrows at the above-mentioned warriors, while, behind them, at least one "cowherd" raises his stick to lead the beasts (After P. Vinnicombe, 1976: 100, fig. 54).

and those reported in the same region, but this is worth attempting. As a first approach, it is striking to note certain similarities between our scene and a panel discovered by Patricia Vinnicombe on the right bank of the Orange "opposite the junction with the Thala Boliba"<sup>303</sup>. Here again, the painter has organised his depiction into three groups: on the left a herd of bovines moving towards the left, and on the right a very dynamic ensemble of warriors equipped with "hourglass-shaped" shields; between these two groups there is a vertical line of Bushman arch-

ers equipped with quivers over the shoulder, directing their arrows at these warriors, while behind them at least one "cowherd" raises his stick to lead the animals. Without being absolutely identical to the Ventershoek scene, this work clearly constitutes a variation on the same theme (**Fig. 98**), in which one can recognise the stereotype of the vertical line of archers in a defensive position.

The fact that this is an iconographic "clique" is confirmed by the existence of a painting recorded by Patricia Vinnicombe at another

[303] P. Vinnicombe (1976, fig. 54). This locality is not marked on the site distribution map accompanying the author's text.



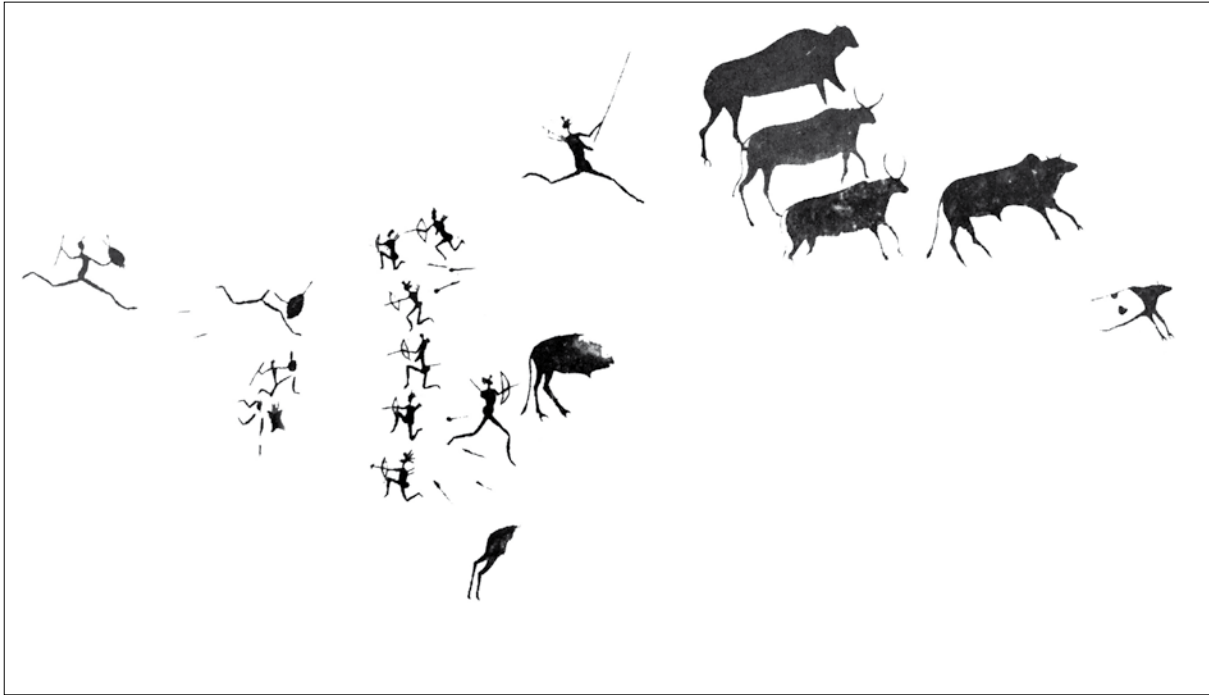


Fig. 99. Painting in "site G3" showing a scene comparable to the preceding one — and thus to that of Christol Cave — but as a mirror image of it (after P. Vinnicombe, 1976: 53, fig. 28).

er site in the same region, showing a variant of the same scene (one might almost dare to say "of the same myth") this time presented as a mirror-image: the herd is on the right and is heading towards the right, guided by a stick wielder, while the big warriors armed with shields and assegais are running from the left; but between these two groups there is still a vertical line of little archers (**Fig. 99**). It is obviously an illustration of a narrative of the same type as that of Christol Cave — in the sense of the "types" of tales defined by folklorists and which are stereotyped texts, capable of

being expressed in different versions<sup>304</sup>. Just as in the case of the myth<sup>305</sup>, the question of the narrated or illustrated tale's veracity follows from the "otherness" of the person posing it, insofar as a culture's myths are, by definition, always "true" for its members.

From the above graphic analysis, it emerges that the painter of the Ventershoek panel, master of the miniature and of detail, painted each subject "in itself", grouping the different elements of his picture in four great ensembles (the bovines, the Bushmen, the big Blacks, the bovine on the right and the men accompany-

[304] A. Aarne and St. Thompson, 1987.

[305] The Greek *muthos* originally designated any kind of "discourse", true or false but, thanks to the influence of its synonym *logos* which was retained in philosophical language to designate well-argued discourse and reasoning, it ended up by taking on the meaning of "fictitious narrative" in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE.





ing it). Their respective placement is ruled not by concern for a truthful presentation, but by a narrative conception of the whole. certainly, during the last twenty years, some severe criticisms have been made against authors who sought to read the “contact scenes” as so many descriptions of real events, thus sustaining “the traditional belief that much San art merely depicts daily events”<sup>306</sup>. But although the ethnocentric nature of such a generalised claim is obvious to everyone, one should not deny a priori that there is any narrative aspect in certain of the paintings. The question of the veracity of the myth — which always tells the truth in the framework of the culture in which it is expressed but is possibly “false” for the historian analysing it from outside — is secondary. What is important is first of all recognising on the wall the very presence of a myth, a task that is most often considered impossible in the case of rock art expressions, but the preceding pages have tried to show that the internal analysis of compositions can sometimes allow this. From this viewpoint, a new reading with new methods of rock art layouts that are already well-known

might authorise the elucidation of a degree of structuring that is not perceptible at first glance, and which had hitherto escaped analysts.

The painter of the Christol shelter disregarded naturalistic depiction of everything in favour of a stereotypical or “theoretical” view based on details which are very realistic; this *modus operandi* can be seen both in the panel’s general organisation and in most of the elements that it comprises. In any case, the analysis of this panel fully confirms the immediate impression that it incites, felt by Stow, Christol and their successors when they chose to make it an emblematic work of art: its narrative dimension is supported by a very precise organisation. The interplay of colours, the placing of the groups of figures their postures and the numerous details they display, are all placed under a very tight control, an overall vision in which nothing seems to have been left to chance. Except, perhaps, the causes and the outcome of the event it is narrating, if we did not already know them; be that as it may, the die is already cast, and the fate of the ochre men sealed.



[306] C. Campbell (1987: 4).



## 12

**In which the goodies become baddies...**

Although all authors unanimously recognise the people on the left as Bushmen, the names they use to designate those on the right vary: “Ma-Ta-bele” (Christol), “Zulu” (Bleek), “Kaffirs” (Allier, Cartailhac-Breuil), “big Blacks” (Breuil), “Sotho” (van Riet Lowe), “black tribe” or “Blacks” (Woodhouse), “Bantu Blacks (Zulu or Matabele)” (Ellenberger). The opposition between the two groups is sometimes reinforced by an adjective, and authors speak of “big Zulus” confronting “little Bushmen” (Breuil). But in reality, behind this terminological diversity, a smaller ethnic variety is hidden: the black and Bantuphone populations of South Africa can be divided into two cultural subgroups: the Nguni (who inhabit the whole coastal plain parallel to the Drakensberg massif) and the Sotho-Tswana (inhabitants of the plateau). It should be noted that these are merely classificatory categories that arise from linguistics. The Nguni subgroup is made up of populations extending from the Eastern Cape to Swaziland, including the Xhosa, the Zulus and the Swazi. It is these groups which, as the white powers expanded, were included in the disparaging name of “Kaffirs”<sup>307</sup>. The Sotho-Tswana subgroup is primarily made up of populations which go by the names of Sotho, Pedi and Tswana. So the authors’ terminological variety illustrates both a process of terminological

sedimentation in the naming of the other, and also a disagreement concerning the specific ethnic identification of the panel’s “big Blacks”.

With regard to our “battle scene”, Bert Woodhouse has reminded us of the elements available to help us proceed to this identification in rock paintings:

«Blacks were often painted in black, frequently shown as armed with assegais and usually equipped with shields of the hourglass shape favoured by the Sotho, which was directly derived from the shape of a cowhide, or with the large oval shields of the Nguni»<sup>308</sup>.

This is likewise the opposition described by one of the Protestant missionaries who travelled in this country in the 1830s:

«This defensive weapon [the shield] has different shapes in different tribes. Those of the Kaffirs [=Nguni] are oval and cover the whole body. The Bechuana [=Sotho-Tswana] claim that this advantage is more than balanced by the problems presented by these flexible boards when it rains for a long time or the wind blows. They prefer a light shield cut out of the thickest part of a cow hide»<sup>309</sup>.

Small Sotho “hourglass-shaped” shield versus large Nguni oval shield? The choice seems simple. It will be recalled that Dorothea Bleek made

[307] See above, note 116.

[308] B. Woodhouse (1979: 117).

[309] E. Casalis (1933: 177-178).





this observation about the Ventershoek panel: “This is clearly a recent painting, probably dating from the Zulu invasion of about 1821”<sup>310</sup>. To which invasion is she referring? Despite the illusion caused by the apparent precision of the date, Dorothea Bleek is clearly alluding hereto the more-or-less state of war that characterises the first third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, corresponding to the reign (ca. 1816-1828) of Chaka in Zulu country, the Zulu military hegemony in the Natal region, and the successive migrations that this provoked in a large part of southern Africa. This period has remained known in historiography under the names of mfecane (in the Nguni languages) or difaqane (in Sotho-Tswana). We are well aware that this period has been the subject of critical works which continue to question the precise development of events at the level of the sub-continent, but also Shaka’s political role and, more broadly, the relations of causality between the rise of the Zulu kingdom and this regional turbulence<sup>311</sup>. Although we agree with these revisionist viewpoints, they are not of direct concern to us here, insofar as we are only interested in certain aspects of the material culture of the populations of this period. They should merely invite prudence, and caution us not to be too specific in identifying the groups and events in question. For that reason, attributing a possible Zulu presence on the banks of the Caledon to a specific raid led by Chaka’s regiments during this period (or even in 1821) would certainly be risky. Paul Ellenberger’s ethnic attribution for the AFEBAT is not very different: the Ndebele are one of those groups which fled Natal at this time, settled on the plateau and raided the Sotho-Tswana populations.

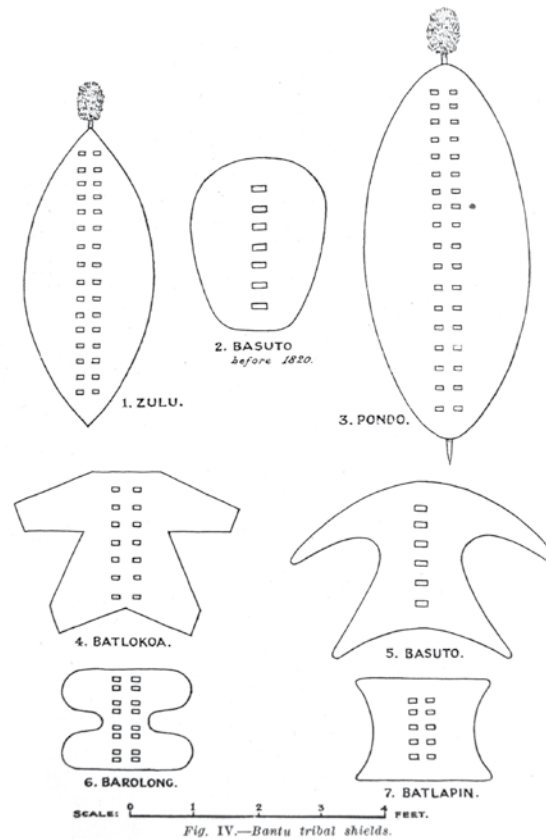


Fig. 100. Typology of Bantu shields, after G. Tylden (1946).

The shields carried by the black warriors in the Ventershoek panel are clearly oval. And everything points to this shape being indeed attributable, if not to the Zulus or Ndebele in particular, then at least to a much bigger cultural assemblage that perhaps corresponds approximately to a “Nguni” group in general (even though we are well aware that this is a simple linguistic category). A succinct study by Major Tylden<sup>312</sup> contrasts the big ovaloid shields of the Zulus or Pondo with the small waisted or indented shields of the Sotho-Tswana (Fig. 100).

[310] G. W. Stow & D. Bleek (1930). The whole extract was cited earlier.

[311] Hamilton ed. (1995), Wylie (2006).

[312] G. Tylden (1946).





Fig. 101. Sotho shield, after E. Casalis (1861: 136).

A more systematic study of the material culture of the Cape Nguni confirms the oval shape and the great size of Nguni shields<sup>313</sup>, whereas other sources confirm the indented form of Sotho-Tswana shields, and the characteristic “shirt” shape of Sotho shields (Fig. 101)<sup>314</sup>. This opposition is at least valid for the period after the 1820s, before which we have no (or very little) written or iconographic documentation relating to Bantu-speaking populations. What about before this date? C. van Riet Lowe<sup>315</sup>,

basing himself on the above-mentioned study by Major Tylden, pointed out that the shields used by the Sotho before 1820 could have been of the same type as those considered to be “Zulu” by Dorothea Bleek. So there was an oval type of Sotho shield before 1820. But since Major Tylden’s claim is in fact based only on his own interpretation of the recording of our “battle scene” by Christol, the circular reasoning is flagrant<sup>316</sup>. So let us return to the Nguni identification, which is certainly the most secure at this stage.

Claiming that this is the depiction of Zulu warriors (or other Nguni groups) would fit well with the shape, but also the variability in decoration of the shields, since “The Zulu assiduously assigned (mostly) white, black or brown cow-hide shields to distinguish among themselves the proven, married, and young warriors”<sup>317</sup>. Another



Fig. 102. Nguni warriors armed with big, very elongated oval shields. After E.M. Shaw & N.J. van Warmelo (1972-1988:329, 332-333, pl.)

piece of testimony, dating to December 1841, evokes Zulu shields “of 4 feet 6 inches”, made “of oxhide, some white, others black”, specifying that there were also “reds, blues, yellows, whites mixed with red patches, and semi-black semi-whites”<sup>318</sup>. However, one cannot leave things at these aspects of shape and decoration. It has been said that Nguni shields have a very elongated oval shape, but are also generally much bigger than those in our fresco, in such a way as to protect their bearer from head to foot (Fig. 102)<sup>319</sup>, although examples are known of small rounded shields (Fig. 103)<sup>320</sup>.

Moreover, one essential technical point is that the inner handle that braces the shield generally sticks out at both ends. For the warriors, this detail is important, because “the projection at the end serves to catch the darts of the assailant and turn them aside by a twist of the hand”<sup>321</sup>. One can scarcely imagine that the Ventershoek painter, who

[313] E. M. Shaw & N. J. van Warmelo (1981: 328-334).

[314] E. Casalis (1861: 136).

[315] C. Van Riet Lowe (1946: 38).

[316] G. Tylden (1946: note on illustration 2).

[317] A. Delegorgue (1847, I: 400-401).

[318] E. M. Shaw & N. J. van Warmelo (1972-1988:329, 332-333).

Cf. also what G. W. Stow (1905: 207) wrote about the Nguni of the 1820s: “They used a shield of ox hide large enough to cover their bodies completely, on shrinking themselves into a smaller compass”, doubtless basing himself on the testimony of authors of this period, like H. F. Fynn (2004 : 254): “With an ox hide one can only make two shields, because they normally have to extend from the chin to the feet, in length, and be almost twice the width of the body”.

[319] Photograph exhibited in the Royal Natal Museum in Pietermaritzburg.

[320] Museum label for a Nguni/Zulu shield in the Pitt Rivers Museum (Oxford) collected before 1874 (No. 1874 in the catalogue).





was so attentive to details, could have forgotten this essential element of the warfare technique of the “parrying stick”. As for the “reserve” of assegais held inside the shield (as is the case with the black people in our fresco), this too fails to constitute a discriminating factor, because the Sotho also had the custom, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, of holding their assegais in a bunch, like the Nguni<sup>322</sup>. Apart from these weapons they also, like the Zulus, used the “club” (knobkerrie), which can be recognised very clearly in one of the painted groups at Ventershoek, where individuals equipped with such clubs and “hourglass-shaped” shields comparable to those of the Batlapin and Barolong<sup>323</sup> (Fig. 100, No. 6 and 7) seem to threaten cattle (Fig. 12, No. 2, 7, 11), in an ensemble which would provide a perfect caption to this passage by Anthony Atmore and Peter Sanders:

«Before the difaqane, warfare among the Sotho was usually little more than cattle-raiding. Some attacks were combined operations executed by all the fighting men of a chiefdom, but most were the exploits of a few adventurous individuals. The raiders would each be armed with a bunch of long spears, a knobkerrie and a light oxhide shield, and they would usually approach the enemy's cattle along river beds and through mountain kloofs [an Afrikaans word for ‘ravine’] relying partly on surprise to achieve their ends»<sup>324</sup>.

In our painting, a few white patches are still visible on the red in the bodies of these carriers of shields and knobkerries, which could correspond to the fact that the Batlapin “as well as the other kindred tribes”<sup>325</sup>, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, had the custom of dyeing their bodies red with white markings<sup>326</sup>.



Fig. 103. Nguni warrior armed with a small round shield  
(Photo exhibited in the Royal Natal Museum at Pietermaritzburg).

But let's return to our battle scene. One is forced to accept that the shield types do not permit an immediate and definitive ethnic identification, despite what most authors have believed. Although a certain resemblance (oval shape, decoration) suggests a Nguni type, it is nevertheless the case that several characteristics of Nguni shields (large size, projection of the handle) are not depicted

[321] A. Atmore & P. Sanders (1971: 535).

[322] E. Casalis (1861: 135-136), G. Tylden (1946, fig. IV, No. 7).

[323] According to G. W. Stow (1905: 489) “The weapons of the Barolong were of the same description as those of the Batlapin, with the exception of the shield, which was square instead of the peculiar shapes used by the latter”. The same author had earlier specified that in the 1820s “the weapons of the Batlapin [...] were a bow and quiver of poisoned arrows hanging from the shoulder, a shield with a number of assegais attached, and a club or battle-axe” (1905 : 435).

[324] A. Atmore & P. Sanders (1971: 535).

[325] G. W. Stow (1905: 436).

[326] Ibid.



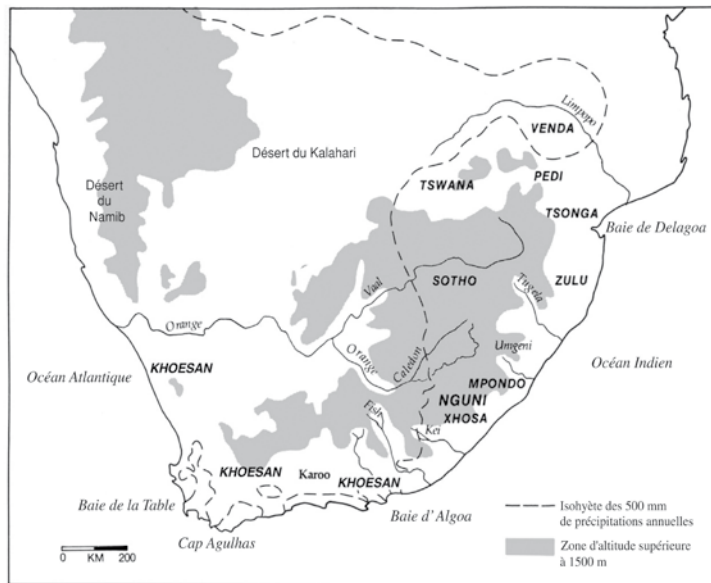


Fig. 104. Map showing the locations of the main populations mentioned in the text; both the Mfecane and colonisation and various other social transformations have contributed to the constitution of their identities.

here, while those which are present in the image (bunch of assegais held inside the shield) appear to be rare among the Nguni, and are, moreover, known among the Sotho-Tswana. These various characteristics may possibly indicate that we are dealing with a type of Nguni shield that predates the modifications of the brace and of warfare equipment that occurred among the northern Nguni under the influence of the “Zulu revolution” at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. So we favour the hypothesis of a “pre-Chaka” shield type. The same conclusion could be reached from the use of assegais — projectile weapons which Chaka had replaced with short daggers which

made hand-to-hand fighting obligatory and decisive<sup>327</sup> — as well as from the highly codified battle dress (turban decorated with a big crane feather and strips of monkey skin; ox tails at arms and legs; cords crossed on the chest sewn with strips of skin; skirt made from a score of skins), imposed by Chaka on his regiments<sup>328</sup>, and which is not to be found in this panel. In actual fact, the dress of the black warriors evokes to some extent the everyday Zulu gear described by Henry Francis Fynn: plumes stuck into a waxed raffia headdress sewn into close-cropped hair; big necklaces of beads; waist belt “to [which] is attached several strips of fur or prepared skins”<sup>329</sup>. Such an outfit, like the weapons (assegais and shields) we are shown, may very well have formed part of the Zulus’ warfare gear before the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century... But it has to be said that we have no means of judging, just as we have no evidence for appraising the shield types and the elements of clothing or jewellery of the Sotho before that same period. Besides, the ethnic indecision is compounded here by an even deeper problem: it makes little sense to speak of Zulus or Sotho before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when one takes into account what we know of the formation processes of these identities through agglomeration of groups, political centralisation, standardisation of language and numerous other cultural practices. So this new area of indecision sends us back to another frontier: the chronological limit that separates the state of continuum of populations (**Fig. 104**) from practices and varied and overlapping cultural elements, and the discrete population groups that emerged from the mfecane and other so-

[327] But here again it is difficult to make use of these characteristics for a reliable chronological attribution. The stabbing-spear introduced by Chaka in the 1820s did not totally replace the throwing spear, which was still being used during the Anglo-Zulu confrontations of 1879, for example.

[328] H. F. Fynn (1986 : 284-285 ; 2004 : 253-254). Here is Fynn’s description of the Zulus’ martial equipment: “Their war trappings are mostly provided by the King, each regiment being differently accoutred, the lightest coloured shields belonging to the men and the darkest to the young lads. The dress worn by the men is a turban of otter skin round the forehead, stuffed with bull-rush seed or dry cowdung. In front stands a feather nearly three feet in length, which is obtained from the gigantic Kaffir crane. From the turban, hanging down the cheeks, are two pieces of monkey skin, and in the upper parts, are bunches of feathers, having been stripped of the quills, which make them light, neat and airy. Round the neck is hung a necklace of pieces of wood which are worn as medals of bravery. One is added for every one they kill in battle till there is no room left. Round the arms and legs are ox and cow’s tails; across the breast are two cords to which is suspended the skin of the genet and monkey cut into strips about six inches long and half an inch broad, which are so neatly twisted that a stranger without untwisting it would be assured that they were the tails as cut from the body, merely the bone having been taken out. The umcubulu or dress worn round the waist, is made in the same manner, only so long as to reach within an inch of the knee. They generally contain from 15 to 20 skins in a dress, sometimes 50 or 60, putting an astonishing value on them, which, if it is ever offered, will not induce one to part with it. The warlike appearance of a man in his full dress, certainly exceeds anything of the kind that any savage tribes wear in South Eastern Africa”.

[329] H. F. Fynn (1986 : 291-295 ; 2004 : 262-265).





cial transformations contemporaneous with colonisation, henceforth subjected to cultural norms dictated by strong powers. From the point of view of the observer situated on this temporal frontier, which forms a barrier to the past, what conclusion can one draw except that the undeniable “air de famille” that exists between the contemporary Nguni (or even more especially the Zulus) and the black warriors in our fresco should not be seen as decisive, when one takes into account the multiple biases and ethnic presuppositions which tend to augment the credibility of this hypothesis unduly?

This accumulation of ethnic and cultural uncertainties contrasts with how sure most authors are that their interpretation of the image is the “right” one. But perhaps for this very reason, one should be less determined to seek a specific ethnic or cultural identification, and instead pay some attention to the forms of hybridisation and cultural circulation, to the metamorphoses of identities — as the uncertainties in reading our battle scene certainly invite us to do. The mfecane period unquestionably provides an ideal context for the observation of such phenomena. Hence, at the very beginning of the 1820s, the state of war generated by the Zulu expansion, allied to the consequences of a serious drought, provoked the emigration of the northern-Nguni clans, the Ngwane and Hlubi, towards the plateau, where they clashed and entered into competition with Sotho-Tswana groups. Various sources evoke the forms of interaction and hostility that took place in the high basin of the Vaal between several chiefdoms led by Matiwane (Ngwane clan, relatives and neigh-

bours of the Zulu clan), Mpangazitha (Hlubi clan), MaNthatisi (regent of the Tlokoa) and Moshoeshe (then merely chief of a segment of the Kwenā clan). It was these same actors who can be found, after 1823, in the middle and lower Caledon valley, still neighbours but always in competition for the control of the territory, the capture of cattle and the agglomeration of vassals or dependants. Out of this situation, stoked by the pressure of the Bastards and the Korana from the Orange valley, there arose political and social instability which lasted for a dozen years. This was felt in the Cape colony and neighbouring populations: one can see new “ethnic” entities unfurling that were unknown before: the Mfengu (or Fingo), refugees of various origins who came to seek work and a means of survival in the colony; the Bhaca, a north-Nguni population who undertook a trek to the south along the coastal plain, and settled in the Transkei. People heard about the Mantati or Mantatees (names formed from that of the regent MaNthatisi), warriors of the interior. But above all they feared the “Fetcani” (a term linked to that of mfecane), raiders from the north who fell on the colony’s frontier populations, starting with the Thembu and the Xhosa. Going by the various pieces of testimony, these Fetcani, far from constituting a homogeneous social or cultural group, were doubtless a population with loose ties bringing together segments of chiefdoms and individuals of diverse cultural and social origins who had been dispersed by the state of conflict that reigned in the Caledon valley during this period, and in particular elements of the Hlubi chiefdom which had been conquered and deprived of cohesion in 1825<sup>330</sup>.

[330] The elements of this complex history have been borrowed from: N. Etherington (2001 : 124-133, 147-159) ; J. Wright & C. Hamilton (1989). A narrative of the peregrinations of the Ngwane is given by H. F. Fynn (1986 : 318-321 ; 2004 : 289-294). The missionary Thomas Arbousset provides a description of the different groups residing in the Caledon valley in 1836: T. Arbousset (1933 : 51-59).





We do not know the details and chronology of the raids carried out by these Fetcani, but it is at least known that they operated out of the Orange-Caledon triangle, that is, from the double valley in the middle of which the Jammersberg forms an observatory and a place of passage towards the mountains.

If one were to favour this hypothesis, it should be noted that it would provide a satisfying explanation for the visibly hybrid nature of the martial equipment of the “big Blacks”, and that in any case it accounts for the presence of Nguni cultural elements that have not been transformed by the Zulu revolution<sup>331</sup>. We should point out that it also enables us to

focus on several useful instances of “distancing”. Firstly, a chronological distancing, since in placing the event in the decade that precedes the Great Trek, it indirectly confirms the sequence of artistic interventions on the wall which we presented earlier. Then an ethnico-cultural distancing, since, in confirming the intuition of several authors that the event is linked to the mfecane, we can propose a more convincing contextual identification than the usual ones. Finally a narrative distancing since, at the end of this reasoning, the “big Blacks” no longer appear as victims seeking vengeance for a prior raid, but as aggressors seeking to amass their livestock at other people’s expense.



[331] It is indeed necessary to present the hypothesis here that at least some of the groups of north-Nguni origin who were present in the Caledon valley in this period had only been partially affected (or not at all) by the transformations of war techniques and the equipment brought about by Chaka’s Zulus.





## 13

## ...and the aggressors, the victims

We are only aware of two exceptions to the classic interpretation of the Ventershoek fresco as a scene of retaliation (thus assuming an earlier episode). The first comes to us from Dr Hamy, a famous Americanist who spoke up in 1884 during a session of the *Société de Géographie de Paris* to comment — says the account of the session — on “a precious document which has just been collected from one of the caves of the country [of the Basutos] by Mr. Christol [and which] reached the Société thanks to Mr. Paul Mirabaud acting as an intermediary”. Dr Hamy’s comment deserves to be cited in extenso:

«What is particularly interesting about Mr. Christol’s discovery is that the drawing he presents us with, and which is a reduced version of the original, moreover a very well made reduction (Mr. Christol is a pupil of Gérôme) — this drawing depicts a scene in the history of the country. It is a band of Matabeles, that is of northern Zulus, whose powerful organisation has caused a lot of blood to be shed in southern Africa. They are running, armed with their shields and their assegais, to hurl themselves at a troop of Bushmen, who are defending themselves as best they can. The Matabeles are represented in

black, with a white or red belt around the body, and the head decorated with feathers. As for the Bushmen, they are painted red with that skin colour that is peculiar to them; they are armed with their little bows, with which they are defending themselves to the best of their ability against their stronger aggressors; all of this is very precise. On the left side of the scene, a herd of zebus [sic] is being driven back by its guardians, who are trying to protect it against the assailants. This is clearly a historic scene, depicting one of the phases of the Bushmen’s expulsion by stronger blacks. This document is of great importance; we must be grateful to Mr. Christol for having reproduced it, and to Mr. Mirabaud for bringing it to the Société’s attention»<sup>332</sup>.

This text is all the more interesting because it is the first that was ever published about the “battle scene” recorded by Christol.

Emphasising its “very great importance”, Hamy recognises in this “historic scene” the representation of an attack made by Zulus against a group of Bushmen who are defending themselves and protecting their cattle “as best they can”. Six years later, another author was to put his name to a similar interpretation.

[332] *Compte rendu des Séances de la Société de Géographie de la Commission Centrale*, Paris, Société de Géographie, 1884, Session of 21 March 1884, pp. 203-204.





This was Raoul Allier<sup>333</sup> who, in his preface to Christol's book called *Au Sud de l'Afrique*, wrote:

«Another painting that he has copied and reproduced represents an encounter between Kaffirs and Bushmen; the latter are attacked and, while some of them are chasing the oxen and cows to get them to shelter, others are withstanding the onslaught of the enemy: the assailants are giants compared to those who are trying to resist them»<sup>334</sup>.

However, all later readings will naturally take the opposite view to these, and will consider the same scene — just as “historic” — to be the illustration of an attack perpetrated by a Bushman group against Zulus (or another related group) from whom they have stolen their cattle.

Certainly, in both cases, the painting, considered to be a “scene in the history of the country”, is not read for what it really shows, but for what it represents: “the Bushmen's expulsion by stronger blacks” according to Hamy, “contact between the early nomadic hunter-gatherers and the newly arrived herders” according to all the other authors. In both cases, the same image, which one might suppose would enrich the historian's documentation, is in reality informed by the historian's presuppositions, thus allowing diametrically opposed readings. But at least Hamy's reading, by placing itself outside the “comic strip” paradigm, escapes the temptation which at the same time marks the epistemological limit of all the other authors: that of considering the little red men on the left of the scene — and the presumed authors of the fresco — as Bushmen in the (alas) common meaning of the term, that is to say hunt-

er-gatherers congenitally recalcitrant where stockrearing is concerned, and thus necessarily predators on other people's herds.

It is of course not unimportant that the principal discordant viewpoints came from the only authors among the long and prestigious list of interpreters of the fresco who were not (even partially) Africanists, and who were thus not impregnated by the conceptual framework in which the classic interpretation was forged.

Alas, Hamy very quickly reconsidered his reading, because in 1908, during a lecture delivered at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, he describes as follows the “picture which the Rev. Christol copied in the cave of the Baroa (legaga la baroa) between Wepener and Hermon and of which one can see a very reduced reproduction in his interesting book on South Africa”:

«Some Bosjesmans have carried off a herd of zebras [*sic* !] which three of the thieves are driving before them, while seven others are confronting a dozen Matabeles who are pursuing them. All the actors in this little drama are in profile. The Bosjesmans are painted in this colour of new leather which is peculiar to them; armed with their little bows, they are carrying a short quiver filled with arrows on their backs. The Matabeles are black, a white or red belt wrapped around the body, and some of them have their head decorated with white feathers. Their oval or figure-of-eight shield is embellished in the same way at the top, and while running, jumping or kneeling they are throwing their assegais at the enemy»<sup>335</sup>.

Let's ignore the so-called zebus which became zebras through some cacography doubtless attributable to the session's scribe, but we

[333] Raoul Allier, a Protestant evangelist, was a Professor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Protestant Theology in Paris. He is best known for having, through his articles in the republican and anticlerical daily *Le Siècle*, played a very active role in the fight in favour of the separation of Church and State (cf.: [http://jeanbauberotlaicite.blogspot.com/emile\\_combes/](http://jeanbauberotlaicite.blogspot.com/emile_combes/)).

[334] R. Allier (in F. Christol, 1900: x).

[335] E.-T. Hamy (1908: 389).





can only wonder about the reason for such a reversal of opinion on the part of the author. Fortunately, Hamy himself provides us with the explanation, in a footnote added to the text of his lecture:

«A first copy at one-third size of this curious picture came to the Société de Géographie de Paris thanks to the late Mr. Paul Mirabaud acting as intermediary, and I gave a short description in the session of 21 March 1884. I made the mistake of seeing in it a scene of the expulsion of the Bosjesmans by the Matabeles [...] Since then a second copy of the same document was presented by the Rev. Dieterlen to Mr. Richard Andree who first published it in volume xii of the *Mittheilungen* [sic] of the Vienna Anthropological Society (1887), and then in his *Ethnographische Parallelen und Vergleiche* (Neue folge, Leipzig, 1889, in-8°, taf. iii), giving it its true meaning which is far more modest»<sup>336</sup>.

So what is the “true meaning” given to the fresco by Richard Andree, a comparativist well known to all the anthropologists of the early 20th century for his masterly study of myths about the flood<sup>337</sup>? It is presented to us in a text which this mythologist devoted to the “drawings by Natural peoples”:

«The illustration shown here (pl. iii) of a very characteristic Bushman painting comes from a communication from Mr. H. Dieterlen of the *Société des missions évangéliques* in Paris, who copied it in a cave located two kilometres from the missionary station of Hermon. Some Bushmen have stolen a herd of bovines from some Kaffirs, and they are now being pursued by those who have been robbed. The bovines with dappled

hides of various colours are drawn in a naturalistic way; perspective is missing. Three Bushmen are driving the herd, while their other companions, armed with bows and poisoned arrows, are confronting their Kaffir pursuers. The latter are carrying their well-known shields and are armed with assegais. The great difference between the little Bushmen and the big Kaffirs is noteworthy, and the artist perhaps wanted to express by this means the heroic character of the action which consists, for these little men, of daring to oppose gigantic muscled Kaffirs. This image not a simple fantasy; it is an ethnographic illustration, an aspect of the life of South African peoples, an event of a kind that still happens»<sup>338</sup>.

The image that illustrates this text on the opposite page is unsigned (**Fig. 105**) but seems to be a variant of those presented by Christol<sup>339</sup>, with a few differences: the two groups of combatants are more distinctly separated than in Christol, one black shield (that of the dead or wounded person) has become white, and the distribution of the arrows is different. The fact remains that the whole thing does not seem to have really been recorded by H. Dieterlen, who doubtless merely sent this document to Andree<sup>340</sup>. As one can see, the latter very clearly proceeds by evocation of a missing image. In his text, a first passage — “Bushmen have stolen...” — clearly alludes to a first image, that in reality does not exist, which should have depicted the scene of the theft, and what follows (“they are now being pursued”) describes the actual image in terms of what the missing image should have represented. The stratagem is quite blatant

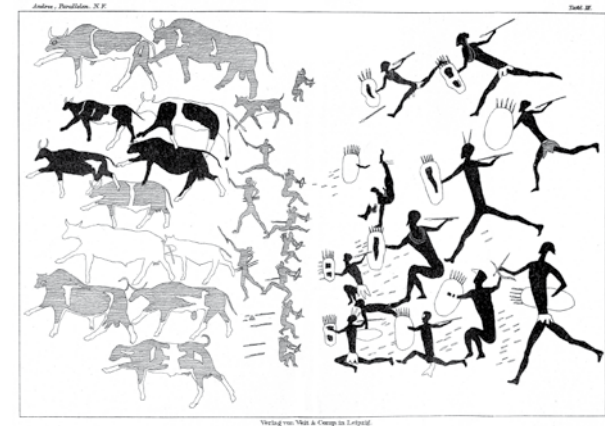


Fig. 105. Recording of the main panel in Christol Cave used in 1889 by R. Andree in his treatise on ethnographic comparisons. It is the same recording by Hermann Dieterlen that was utilised by Cartailhac and Breuil — cf. Fig. 35 (after R. Andree, 1889: 67-68).

[336] E.-T. Hamy (1908: 389, n. 1).

[337] R. Andree (1891).

[338] “Die hier wiedergegebene Abbildung (Taf. iii) einer sehr charakteristischen Buschmannsmalerei entstammt einer Mitteilung des Herrn H. Dieterlen von der ‘Société des missions évangéliques’ zu Paris, welcher dieselbe in einer Höhle kopierte, die zwei kilometer von der Missionsstation Hermon entfernt ist. Buschmänner haben eine Rindherde den Kaffern gestohlen und werden nun von den Beraubten verfolgt. Die verschiedenfarbigen und scheckigen Rinder sind naturwahr, wenn auch verzeichnet; Perspektive fehlt. Drei Buschmänner treiben die Herde vor, während ihre übrigen Gefährten mit Bogen und vergifteten Pfeilen bewaffnet, sich den verfolgenden Kaffern widersetzen. Letztere tragen die bekannten Schilde und als Waffen Assagaien. Bemerkenswert ist der übertriebene Größenunterschied zwischen den kleinen Buschmännern und großen Kaffern, durch den der Künstler vielleicht das Heroische der That ausdrücken wollte, daß jene kleinen Leute sich den riesigen, muskelstarken Kaffern zu widersetzen wagten. Das Bild ist kein bloßes Werk der Einbildungskraft; es ist eine ethnographische Illustration, eine Seite aus dem südafrikanischen Völkerleben, ein Ereignis, das heute noch vorkommt” (R. Andree, 1889: 67-68).

[339] For Dieterlen’s variation, see also Fig. 35, and for that drawn by Guillaume, see Fig. 32.

[340] As is noted by E.-T. Hamy (1908: 389, n. 1).





and yet it was sufficient to throw someone as prudent as Hamy, and completely change his opinion.

Andree's reading was to enjoy a fine posterity, since it was repeated in 1916 by Karl Weule<sup>[341]</sup> in his book on the psychology of war<sup>[342]</sup>, and again in 1920 by the art historian Karl Woermann<sup>[343]</sup> in a synthesis that went through many editions and which comments on our document in these terms:

«The depiction that has become the best known, thanks to Andree, is that which the French missionary H. Dieterlen copied in a rock shelter located two kilometres from the Hermon mission station: some Bushmen have robbed some Kaffirs of their cattle herd; it is being driven to the left and the Kaffirs, armed with shields and assegais, are rushing after the thieves who turn to fire a hail of arrows at their tall enemies. How well the contrast between the big dark Kaffirs and the small light Bushmen is rendered! How well the running cattle are depicted! How excellently and vividly the whole tableau is depicted! But here there is as little light and shade and perspective as in the depictions by the Australians»<sup>[344]</sup>.

Thirteen years before visiting the site in person in 1985, thanks to the help of Bert Woodhouse, the ethologist Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt mentioned our panel in a book devoted to the “biology of peace and war”, again basing himself on the illustration used by Richard Andree — and which he only knew through Karl Weule — to support the idea that in southern Africa “in interethnic clashes, Bushmen trying to steal the cattle of Herdsmen tribes were often the aggressors”<sup>[345]</sup>.



Fig. 106. Cover illustration of “The Stone Age Archaeology of Southern Africa”, a book published in 1974 by Clavil Garth Thompson.

It is no surprise that the caption he added to the image is as follows:

«Bushman rock painting showing cattle raid. The Bushmen are seen driving the cattle away, while a rearguard keeps the pursuing Bantus at bay»<sup>[346]</sup>.

The emblematic nature of our panel was both recognised and reinforced by the authors who used it on the cover of their books. Such was the case in 1974 of Clavil Garth Thompson, in *The Stone Age Archaeology of Southern Africa* (Fig. 106), even though this book only deals with the lithic industries of southern Africa, and only two pages out of 518 refer to rock art, very cursorily<sup>[347]</sup>. This type of use reached its acme in 1992, when Alan G. Morris chose

[341] Having become director of the Museum für Völkerkunde in Leipzig in 1906, Karl Weule was Germany's first Professor of Ethnography and his courses were most notably taken by Géza Róheim.

[342] K. Weule (1916).

[343] Karl Woermann (1844-1933), art historian, Professor at the Düsseldorfer Kunstakademie then director of the Sächsischen Gemäldegalerie in Dresden. He cites Andree, using the same illustration as him in the second volume of his history of art in four volumes, which enjoyed great success, and which was rapidly translated into English and Italian.

[344] Woermann (1920: 12).

[345] I. Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1979: 142).

[346] I. Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1972: 142 and 145, fig. 16).

[347] C. G. Sampson (1974: 368-370).





our panel — or at least its partial recording by Thomas Dowson (**Fig. 107**) — to illustrate the cover of a book devoted to the physical anthropology of the protohistoric populations of the Lower Orange, and entitled *The Skeletons of Contact*<sup>348</sup>.

In 1993, Bert Woodhouse, who has frequently taken an interest in the problem posed by scenes of warfare recognisable in the rock art of South Africa<sup>349</sup>, would still maintain that the figures “clearly depict the Bushman theft of cattle from blacks and the inevitable reprisals”, and that “the clearly-painted cattle, Bushmen and black warriors are evidence of important narrative painting of conflict between two different ways of life, the hunter/gatherer and cattle-herders”<sup>350</sup>.

This process of appealing to “the missing image” is still being used by contemporary anthropologists or historians. Hence, a synthesis entitled *War before Civilization*<sup>351</sup>, published in 1996, evokes the rock paintings left by the San as evidence of their fights against the Khoekhoen and the Nguni. What do these paintings show us? “Khoikhoi or Bantu retaliation for San livestock raiding”<sup>352</sup>. But, while the only image used by the author to illustrate this claim certainly presents “small-statured bowmen without shields (San) fighting large-statured warriors bearing shields, spears, and knobkerries (Nguni)”<sup>353</sup>, on the other hand this image provides absolutely no indication of a herd! So here we are, coming to grips with some definitely guilty people, but who have no motive at all. Which prompts us to take a new look at the whole dossier here, and to pose this question which has been delayed for too long: what if those who we thought to be the aggressors were the victims?

Let’s begin by examining the herd, which could in fact be theirs. The differently accentuated hump on the animals accords well with the variability in sanga cattle, an African variety that arose from the cross-breeding of the North-African indigenous variety (*Bos taurus primigenius*) and the Asian zebu (*Bos taurus indicus*). The two types can be distinguished in rock art depictions, insofar as the zebu has a thoracic hump (it is sometimes called “chest-humped”), whereas the sanga has a cervico-thoracic hump (it is “neck-humped”). It is clearly the second type that is depicted in our painting, as was recognised by H. Epstein, who presented a partial copy by James Walton to illustrate “the original sanga cattle of the Basuto”<sup>354</sup>, while specifying that most of these animals were decimated in 1896 by an epidemic of cattle plague (rinderpest)<sup>355</sup>, and that the stock was then reconstituted from black-hide sangas from the Drakensberg.

So we are here in familiar territory. Let’s also note that the diversity in accentuation of the hump, together with the diversity of hides, are a strong indication of the very mixed nature of the herd. In other contexts, this could be evidence for the weak genetic control exerted on the livestock by its owners. In the context of southern Africa, however, it points instead to the intensive circulation of bovines, the principal object of exchange in social transactions of all kinds (especially matrimonial), the principal subject of dispute between groups or individuals, and the principal target of warfare as well as of quarrels. These remarks hold good from one end of the sub-continent to the other, whether in Bantu country (to the East) or among the Khoekhoe stockbreeders of centuries past to the

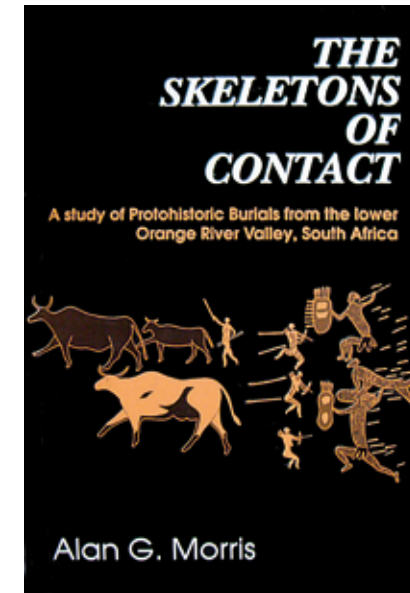


Fig. 107. Partial recording, by Thomas Dowson, of the main scene in Christol Cave, decorating the cover of the book by Alan Morris “The skeletons of contact” (1992).

[348] A. G. Morris (1992).

[349] H. C. Woodhouse (1987, 1988).

[350] H. C. Woodhouse (1993 : 9-10).

[351] L. H. Keeley (1996).

[352] *Ibid.*

[353] *Ibid.* (1996: 133 and fig. 9.1).

[354] H. Epstein (1971, I: 467 and fig. 572). James Walton’s drawing represents bovines Nos. 4, 7, 8 and 10 in our reconstruction.

[355] On the epidemic of 1896, see C. Van Onselen (1972).





West)<sup>356</sup>. So the herd's varied appearance reflects the anthropological context as much perhaps as regional history, as we presented it above. Had it been at the expense of actual Zulus, the supposed raid would have had every chance of bringing in a booty of monochrome cattle matching the colour of the shields (because this was the rule for distribution of cattle according to regiment)<sup>357</sup>. But this diversity, as we saw earlier during our graphic analysis of the panel, is very strictly constrained by the image's rules of composition: the structure in two inverted triangles, and alternating hide colours. Certainly, this organisation of the depiction may reveal a kind of symbolic appropriation of an animal that is foreign to the mental universe of "cattle thieves". But let's wager that in this case it testifies (if only indirectly) to the organisation of the real herd. At least that is what a whole bunch of clues tends to demonstrate.

Let's consider the shape of the horns, which as we know is of great importance among pastoral peoples<sup>358</sup>. Only one animal within this herd (No. 5)<sup>359</sup> has horns that curve downwards, a type that is currently known as indlazi by the Nguni<sup>360</sup>. Among certain populations neighbouring our region, especially the Cape Nguni, recurrent evidence indicates that the alteration of horn shape (achieved through using a red-hot iron on the animal's horns at the start of their growth) was reserved for favourite animals, those which were used for racing or for transport and which best obeyed whistles<sup>361</sup>. Nevertheless it should be pointed out that among sanga cattle those without horns or with dangling horns (hanging down because of the absence of a horn core) are not rare. But we should also indicate here that an animal

with dangling horns was thought to confer a very particular prestige on its owner<sup>362</sup>.

So it is perhaps not without importance that this animal has here been placed at the head of the herd. Although nothing positively indicates that the favourite animals were also, among the Nguni, those which led the herds, that was certainly the case among the Khoekhoe stockbreeders, where the animals best trained to respond to whistles were used both as guardians of the herd and as war cattle<sup>363</sup>. Another clue: the three "cowherds" who are driving the herd in front of them are holding herding rods in their hands, and these are clearly distinct from assegais, being longer and with no armatures. For the Bantus of the region, as for the Khoekhoe, such an implement clearly indicates the pastoral nature of their societies<sup>364</sup>.

Finally, it is piquant to note the presence, at the far right of our panel and very far from the battle scene, of a white and black bovine turned to the right, unlike its fellows grouped at left, and framed by two Blacks, one of whom has an oval shield<sup>365</sup> — an object that appears of questionable usefulness within the framework of strictly pastoral activities. So it is highly probable that this animal has been stolen..... by the black warriors. Just the presence of this sub-group that has gone unmentioned by all the commentators would alone make it possible to overturn the generally proposed reading: the herd, on the left, is moved away by three herders; their companions protect them, by copiously firing arrows, from the attack of a group of big Blacks.... two of whom have nevertheless succeeded in pinching one of the animals from the herd.

[356] For the importance of cattle among the Bantus of southern Africa, see A. Kuper (1982); for the Khoekhoe, see R. Elphick (1977 : 53-62).

[357] H. F. Fynn (1986 : 284 ; 2004 : 253).

[358] R. Hazel (1997).

[359] The question remains open for cow No. 10, the shape of whose horns is indistinct.

[360] M. Poland *et al.* (2005 : 132).

[361] E. M. Shaw and N. J. Van Warmelo (1981: 238-259, *passim*).

[362] E. M. Shaw and N. J. Van Warmelo (1981 : 247).

[363] F.-X. Fauvelle-Aymar (2004: 4-5).

[364] E. M. Shaw and N. J. Van Warmelo (1981: 238-259, *passim*).

[365] Fig. 84, No. 62 (the bovine turned to the right), 61 and 63 (the two Blacks who frame it). This little group has almost completely disappeared, but the bovine is still slightly visible on the wall. The people have been restored in accordance with Paul Ellenberger's recordings.





## 14

## In which it is only fitting, in conclusion, to wonder about the identity of the victims, and that of the fresco's authors

It thus appears, at the end of this volume, that the victims are not those we thought. Or rather, that that they are not the victims of what was thought. We had thought our Bushmen to be the victims of a retaliatory action, but rather, they are the victims of an act of pillage. We had assumed the existence of an earlier victim, but the unfortunate villager robbed of his livestock has never appeared before the court, and the film of the raid has never been shown. In short, we should perhaps accept the visual evidence and accept that there are no victims apart from those shown in the image. Through an excessive desire to believe that it was always judicious to break free from a simplistic “literal” reading, we lost sight of this painting’s narrative power, what it says about the attacked and the aggressors, the running and pauses in the battle, the movements of weapons and of evasion, the wounded and perhaps one death, the good order of the herd which does not disperse and needs to be goaded to hurry along. We did not want to believe that these cattle belonged to the Bushmen in the painting, because if words have any meaning, then these Bushmen had to be authentic hunter-gatherers, that is, predators in their environment.

Is it necessary to trace back the genealogy of pillaging between South-African ethnic groups and wonder who — out of these Bushmen-who-have-cattle or these Blacks-victims-who-have-none — were the first to be robbed of their goods? Simply posing the question in this way already provides the answer. If the warriors in the painting are raiding the others’ cattle, isn’t this because they have been, through some accident in the turbulent history of the period, dispossessed of their own, since it is necessary and compulsory for these Blacks to be herders as well as farmers? And conversely, if we clearly see Bushmen protecting their herd, isn’t it because they have acquired (inevitably in an illegal way — and recently, of course) a smattering of stockrearing, which is not well adapted to their culture, and moreover fundamentally deleterious?

But this is not how we should ask questions any more. Our “men in red” — since the terms Bushmen and hunter-gatherers no longer seem well adapted — certainly appear to possess both the hunter’s bow and the herder’s rod, the art of war and that of stockrearing. Is this really the case? Could one not rather say that they are two different bands, one specialising in the herds (the people who are driving the animals), and the other in war? Since we cannot save the





classic interpretation of the panel, we could save in part the idea of groups appropriately defined by their ethnic or economic etiquette if we can establish that there are true herders and their cattle, duly raised by them, and, behind them, Bushman mercenaries who have interposed themselves and are facing their enemies. After all, only those at the back have bows. But this would be a faulty reading, since the men at the front have only lost their paint because of an obliteration of the pigment in this area of the wall, and obliteration that has also affected one of the archers<sup>366</sup> as well as a wounded man<sup>367</sup>. Where the cowherds are concerned, as has been said, some are carrying archers' quivers, and some have assegais picked up during a first phase of the battle, in which they therefore took part.

In short, we are henceforth dealing with a group of individuals of changeable identity. But this changeability is the result of our perceptive frameworks, because it is we who want, who have wanted, these people painted in red to be Bushmen and nothing else, that is, members of a Stone Age society, in other words a society that is still prehistoric — since the event presented by the image could be dated to the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the terminus post quem of the era of written sources for this region. Therefore it is indeed our conceptions of South African prehistoric populations that we need to examine.

We know that the societies which occupied this part of southern Africa before its settlement by Bantu-speaking farmers and the arrival of White colonisers — say, to keep things simple, around 1500 — possessed a material culture which, as good typologists, archaeologists bap-

tised “Later Stone Age”; we know this because archaeology has presented us with hundreds of their sites, generally in rock shelters like that of Ventershoek. We know that these societies spoke languages belonging to the Khoisan family; we know this because their languages have been heard during the past century and a half. We know that these populations were of a physical type characterised by small stature and a skin colour verging on red or yellow; we know this because their skeletons — according to the physical anthropologists — are recognisable in burials, and because their descendants have been encountered and described<sup>368</sup>. But also because these people depicted themselves on the walls of the lines of shelters in this country; we know this because ethnographic testimony makes it possible to attribute most of the country's rock paintings to these native populations. So there is really no problem in accepting that the painter of this fresco was a member of the group depicted on the left of the panel, and that these people in red were Khoisan (to use a polysemous word here that refers to a cultural and linguistic constellation as well as to a group of populations defined by vague biological criteria).

Would an analysis of the “paint pot” used by the author of our fresco make it possible to know more about it? Studies of pigments are still very rare in southern Africa but, after the first attempts using the process of “paper chromatography”<sup>369</sup> — whose results are not reliable<sup>370</sup> —, various paintings of the uKhahlamba / Drakensberg have already been subjected to analyses by Raman spectrography, XRD, or EDX<sup>371</sup>. Where black is concerned, the paints identified in this way in the massif are either

[366] No. 20.

[367] No. 33.

[368] L.H. Wells (1952, 1960); Ph. Tobias (1962, 1975); J. E. Malan (1962); G. T. Nurse, J. S. Weiner & Trefor Jenkins (1985: 122); P. Smith, L. K. Horowitz & E. Kaplan (1992); M. L. Wilson & J. K. Lundy (1994); J. Sealy & S. Pfeiffer (2000); S. Pfeiffer & J. Sealy (2006).

[369] E. Denninger (1971).

[370] I. Rudner (1989).

[371] XRD: X-ray powder diffraction, EDX: energy-dispersive X-ray spectroscopy. See J. C. Hughes & A. Solomon (2000), A. Mazel & A. Warchman (2003), L. Prinsloo *et al.* (2008), W. J. van Rijssen (1990).





Fig. 108. Taking of white pigment for analysis, from one of the fragments conserved in the Musée de l'Homme (photo JLLQ).

charcoal-based<sup>372</sup>, or made up of magnetite, gypsum and quartz<sup>373</sup>. A white-cream colour was obtained from calcite and quartz at Clarke's Shelter, and white was produced from quartz and clay at Nkosazana<sup>374</sup>, and from kaolin and gypsum elsewhere<sup>375</sup>.

What's done is done: the deterioration of the Christol Cave panel is alas irreparable, and many other fragments from sites in South Africa, similarly mutilated, are now to be found in European museums. For example, six fragments of rock paintings removed from the uKhahlamba / Drakensberg by Louis E. Taylor in 1893 are now conserved in Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum<sup>376</sup>. Making the best of a bad job, these fragments scattered in various institutions can at least permit us to carry out paint analyses without the risk of causing further damage to the original sites.

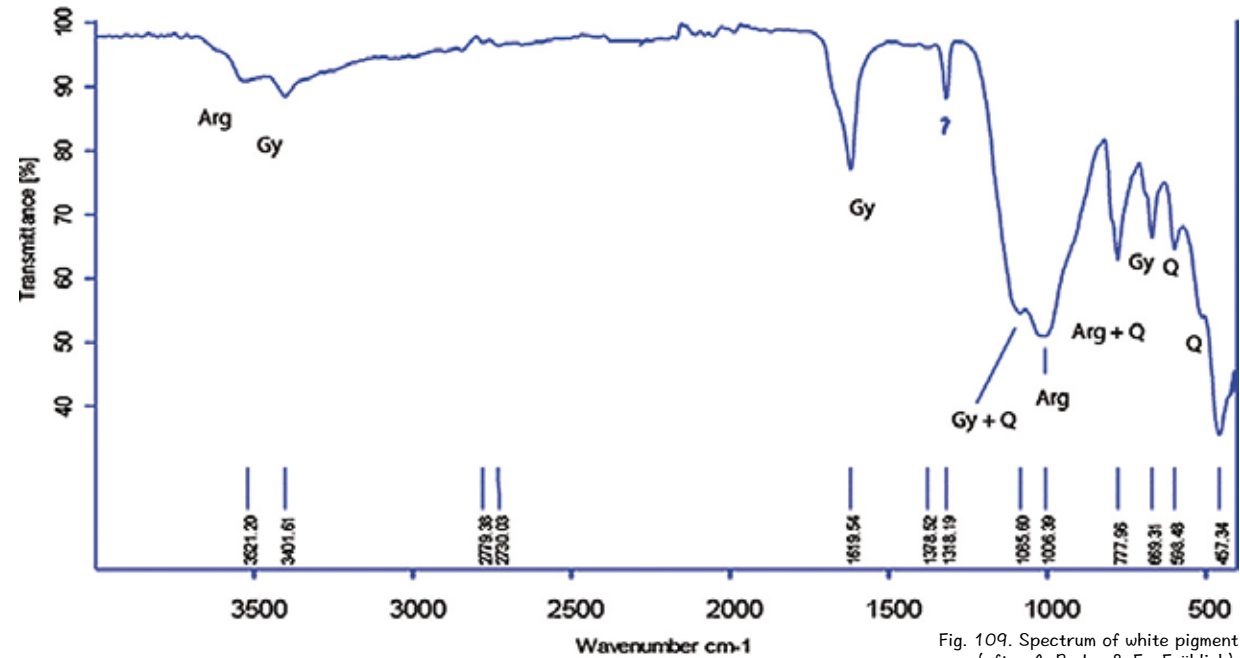


Fig. 109. Spectrum of white pigment (after A. Badou & Fr. Fröhlich).

As a test, therefore, we asked François Fröhlich and Aïcha Badou to analyse pigments from the two fragments of the Christol Cave panel conserved in the Musée de l'Homme (**Fig. 56, 57**)<sup>377</sup>.

These analyses were carried out with infra-red spectroscopy<sup>378</sup> and with a portable Raman equipped with a red laser (530nm). For the analysis by Diamond-ATR, one or two milligrams of white pigment<sup>379</sup> were removed by light scraping on the edge of one of the pieces (**Fig. 108**) and placed on a diamond crystal to be analysed under a pressure of 1.5 kilobars: the spectrum obtained<sup>380</sup> can be seen in **Fig. 109**.

In infra-red microscopy, the surface of the piece was directly analysed by specular re-

[372] L. Prinsloo *et al.* (2008), I. Rudner (1989: 19).

[373] Analysis of a sample taken at Brotherton, by A. Mazel & A. Watchman (2003: 446, tabl. 1, No. 1).

[374] A. Mazel & A. Watchman (2003: 446, tabl. 1, No. 8-9).

[375] I. Rudner (1983: 18, 19).

[376] J. Hobart *et al.* (2002).

[377] We are grateful to our two colleagues for carrying out these analyses so graciously, and our thanks also go all those who facilitated our access to the fragments of the Christol Cave panel conserved at the Musée de l'Homme: Zeev Gourarier, François Semah, Denis Vialou, Odile Romain, Emmanuel Kaiser, Claire Gaillard, David C. Smith.

[378] With a Fourier Transform Infra-Red (FTIR) Bruker Vector 22 Spectrometer. Three infra-red analytical techniques were used: Specac specular reflection, "GoldenGate" Specac Attenuated Total Reflectance with a diamond anvil (Diamond-ATR), and Bruker Hyperion 2000 infra-red microscope.

[379] For reasons of conservation, we were asked not to take samples from the red and black pigments.

[380] This spectrum has a resolution of 2 cm<sup>-1</sup> with 32 accumulations, on a wavelength range of 4000 cm<sup>-1</sup> to 400 cm<sup>-1</sup>.





Fig. 110. Observation of the same piece by infra-red microscope using specular reflection (photo JLLQ).

flection (**Fig. 110**) and the spectra obtained, concerning the white and black pigments, are presented in **Fig. 111** and **112**<sup>381</sup>. Because of the irregular surfaces, the analysis by portable Raman gave no results. The spectra in **Fig. 109** (white pigment) and **111** (black pigment) are virtually identical, and are characteristic of a mixture of substances in which gypsum is markedly predominant. The other constituents are minor — quartz and indeterminate clays — which confirms the surface analysis by infra-red microscope in specular reflection (**Fig. 112**). If the spectra of white and black are identical, it is because the black was perhaps obtained from charcoal produced by combustion, which is inactive in infra-red.

So the painter who produced the Christol Cave fresco seems to have made massive use of gypsum to thicken his paint<sup>382</sup>, as was

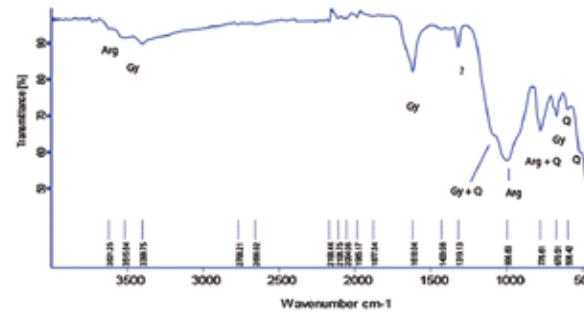


Fig. 111. Spectrum of black pigment (after A. Badou & Fr. Fröhlich).

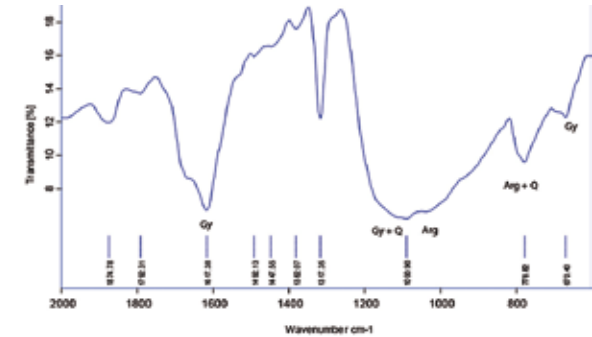


Fig. 112. Spectrum resulting from analysis of the surface of the same fragment by infra-red microscope using specular reflection (after A. Badou & Fr. Fröhlich).

also done sometimes by his colleagues of the uKhahlamba / Drakensberg, who are generally considered to be Bushmen<sup>383</sup>. Where white flatwash is concerned, ethnography<sup>384</sup> and experimentation<sup>385</sup> show that this could have been produced from ostrich egg tests, crushed and then heated; from the droppings of birds of prey; and from white clay or kaolin. In 1983, Ione Rudner drew up a list of all the compositions that had been suggested in the literature — from zinc oxide to the stones of certain fruits, as well as burnt bone, calcite, ash, talc, etc — but she concluded that only the use of a mixture of gypsum and clay had actually been demonstrated so far<sup>386</sup>. Certainly, by using samples taken from paintings in Namibia (Brandberg, Erongo, Spitzkoppe) and South Africa (Drakensberg, South-Western Cape, northern Transvaal), E. Denninger demonstrated that the white paints had been obtained there by mostly using gypsum<sup>387</sup> — which now seems to confirm, at Christol Cave, the analyses we have just cited.

[381] These spectra were obtained at a resolution of 2 cm-1 with 62 accumulations on a wavelength range of 4000 cm-1 to 600 cm-1.

[382] This result should be checked through analysis of the rock's "background noise", which we were not authorised to carry out on the samples from the Musée de l'Homme.

[383] A. Mazel & A. Watchman (2003: 446).

[384] I. Rudner (1982, 1983).

[385] S. T. Bassett (2001: 25-26).

[386] I. Rudner (1982: 45, 1983: 18).

[387] E. Denninger 1963, 1966-a and -b.

See also I. Rudner (1982: 64).





Several authors who worked in the period when people were still readily wetting paintings to study them noticed that certain of the most recent works, made with simple flatwash as at Christol Cave, reacted to humidity differently from the older images, which were polychrome and shaded. Hence, Patricia Vinnicombe noted that “the late white pigments always disappear when dampened, and grey paintings become black”<sup>388</sup>. Comparable modifications had already been reported by Breuil, in particular in the account of his visit to Christol Cave, where he had correctly noticed “a white colour that passes to black when it is wetted, and returns to white when it dries”<sup>389</sup>. On several photographs of our principal scene, after wetting of the wall<sup>390</sup>, one can indeed see that the white of the shields tends to disappear with the humidity, which is best explained by the use of a clay filled with gypsum.

Assuming all this to be true, it is now more delicate, as the reader will have realised, to be more specific in characterising from a socio-economic point of view the group to which our artist belonged, let alone going as far as to risk an ethnic identification, which is more or less unattainable.

It is not the case, however, that “hunter-gatherers with cattle” are something rare. The traveller William Burchell, at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1810-1812), encountered Bushmen who possessed cattle in several regions of South Africa — for example on the banks of the Modder River or also in the Sneeuwberg massif. However, in both cases, it is clear — since it was admitted by the Bushmen who were questioned — that these cattle had been stolen both from Tswana farmers and from a white farmer<sup>391</sup>. In accounts from this period one could find a plethora of reports of this type, in which the informer does not always

imply that the cattle were stolen. On the contrary, Colonel Collins reports in 1809 that

«the precarious subsistence of these poor people reduces them sometimes to the utmost distress. About five or six years since the country was almost totally unprovided with the roots that compose their usual food, in consequence of the want of rain for several successive seasons, many of them were then saved from perishing, by the supplies of sheep and game which they received from the farmers»<sup>392</sup>.

And one of the documents collected in 1883 by Jacob Dirk Barry about the local customs is a statement concerning “A Brief History of the Pandomise Tribe”, according to which these people believe that “Bushmen [...] have the power of bringing rain from the heavens, and cattle are often sent to them as an application for rain”<sup>393</sup>.

Could one find some explicit testimony of not simply possession of cattle, but of an actual practice or stockrearing, that is, of knowledge, practices and gestures linked to the reproduction of cattle, to livestock management, or the control of animals? Here the testimony, taking into account the information that we are asking it to procure for us, is more ambiguous. Burchell, for example, evokes Bushmen hired as guides and cowherds for his expedition:

«The three Bushmen who drove the pack-oxen on before us, hurried them over the rocky ground at so extraordinary a rate, that even on horseback, I found it not easy to keep up with them [...]. This circumstance afforded a most favourable opportunity of ascertaining, by my own experience, how rapidly these wild people could drive a herd of cattle»<sup>394</sup>.

[388] P. Vinnicombe (1976: 141).

[389] MAN, Breuil Archives, autobiography, chapter xxxvii “Travels in South Africa (1929)”, sheets 34-35.

[390] RARI archives, photos RSA-VEN1-17 and 18.

On the wetting, see notes 37 and 206.

[391] W. Burchell (1822, t. I, p. 435-436): “The inhabitants of this kraal [from the name of Karupny, on the shores of the Modder] possessed sheep, goats, and cows; which, however, they confessed were part of plunder obtained from the Caffres, already mentioned as having a kraal on the Gariep ». The author continues, but ceases to describe and reports a statement: “This nation [the Tswana clan in question, or perhaps the Blacks in general], it is said, are in general much in dread of the Bushmen, whose insidious mode of warfare and indefatigable activity in expeditions against their enemies, render them, although so diminutive in stature, more than a match for the tall and athletic Caffre”. *Ibid.*, t. II, p. 197 : [in another Bushman village, this time in the Karoo] “These people were now possessed of large herds of cattle ; and when asked how they had so suddenly become rich, the only explanation they gave us was, that they had received them from another kraal. That they were stolen, I had no doubt; and Keyser even assured me that he knew the greater part of the oxen to be some which belonged to a boor named Cobus Pretorius, living on Sneeuwberg. I counted forty; but my men afterwards observed ten more; and besides these, a flock of about two hundred sheep”.

[392] R. Collins (1809 : 3).

[393] Extract from “A Brief History of the Pandomise Tribe, as also a short account of their Laws and Customs as related by Mabasa, late Regent of Umditshwa’s Section of the Pandomise and Nomlala, an old Councillor, and written by E. S. Bam, interpreter to the Resident Magistrate, Tso-lo, Griqualand East, and forwarded to the Commission by A. R. Welsh,” Esq. in J. D. Barry, 1883, ii : 409).

[394] W. Burchell (1822, t. II, p. 70-71).





Agility, skill of professional thieves, or the acquired talent of cattle drovers? And similarly, in the following example, do we not have an illustration of a combined competence in stock-rearing and hunting? One might be reading a description of our painted people of Venter-shoek, after they have returned to the kraal:

«I noticed that the opening, or entrance, of each hut was always directed towards the inside of the circle, so that the area surrounded by their dwellings, and where they keep their cattle at night, was within sight of all the inhabitants; and no attempt by their enemies to carry off their cattle in the night, could be made without being immediately perceived. With a view, I imagine, of having their arms always in readiness, their hassagays were stuck upright into the ground close by the side of the hut, being, in fact, too long to be placed conveniently within it: while their quivers, arrows and bows, as being their principal weapon, lay by their side, ready at hand for the first moment of alarm»<sup>395</sup>.

Another significant piece of testimony is that from Clark and Melvill, who remarked in 1828 that

«... if the San who lived among Bantu-speaking agro-pastoralists had stock, those who lived beyond the periphery of Bantu expansion seemed to have adopted pastoralism on an even more full-time basis. For example, San near the Modder River in the central Orange Free State reputedly... had always inherited cattle from their fathers»<sup>396</sup>.

But in actual fact, a patient re-reading of texts to find clues to the practice of stockrearing among “Bushmen” who were reputed to be

strictly hunter-gatherers would not suffice to demolish the epistemological barrier that confronts us: that which compels us to place populations into socio-economic categories on which historical discourse is based, but which at the same time resists to make allowance for technical or ideological mutations or changes of identity. Yet ethnography and rock art studies provide evidence for numerous forms of interaction between black farming communities and Khoisan individuals and communities during the last few centuries, especially from economic and symbolic viewpoints. This has been revealed with great force throughout the whole region of mountains and escarpments between South Africa and Lesotho<sup>397</sup>. On that basis, it is clear that numerous San were incorporated into the herding economy of the neighbouring populations, even if only as herd guards. It is even probable that certain San communities were transformed in the course of this process of contact with the black farmers, and became authentic cattle herders. This social plasticity of the San groups, and their permeability to domestic cattle, can even be documented over a much longer period. Hence, the archaeologist teaches us that the hunter-gatherers of southern Africa had been acquainted for 2500 years with pottery and the sheep<sup>398</sup> — elements of material culture that would normally be associated with stockherders<sup>399</sup>; rock art studies teach us that the sheep and then the cow, doubtless introduced later, were integrated into the imagination of the wall artists as much as the other animals of the landscape<sup>400</sup>; finally, the history of the peopling of the area can be read like a history of changes of identity of groups or individuals on contact with new human groups<sup>401</sup>.

[395] Ibid. (1822, t. II, p. 55).

[396] Clark & Melvill (1828, quoted by Schoeman 1988 : 54, *apud* Loubser & Laurens 1994: 99).

[397] Jolly (1996).

[398] F.-X. Fauvelle-Aymar (2004, 2006: 120-*sq.*, 2008); K. Sadr (1990, 2002, 2003, 2005).

[399] A. Manhire *et al.* 1986 : 29, A. B. Smith 2005 : 166-168, 179, and discussion in P. Mitchell 2002 : 232-237.

[400] J. D. Lewis-Williams 1981 : 106, S. L. Hall 1986 : 48, A. Manhire *et al.* 1986 : 27-29)

[401] S. L. Hall 1986, J. Kinahan 1996, C. Schrire 1992, K. Sadr & I. Plug 2001, K. Sadr *et al.* 2003, K. Sadr 2003, P. Jolly 2007.





## 15

## Epilogue, in which the authors withdraw

To end this long meditation, in the face of a wall that retains a good number of its secrets, it remains to examine the last paintings executed in the shelter. These are geometric finger markings which, for the most part, resist all interpretation, and which accompany little images of ostriches (and perhaps other birds) in white flatwash, one of which<sup>402</sup> seems obliterated by a figure<sup>403</sup> that recent studies<sup>404</sup> have made it possible to recognise as a fringed hide apron (**Fig. 84, No. 77** and detail **Fig. 85, 86**).

This garment, which cannot be recognised except by placing it into the abundant series of its counterparts, from the most naturalist to the most schematic, occurs, painted with fingers, in numerous shelters of southern Africa, where it marks the change of status during rites of passage undergone by Khoekhoe adolescents.

The final graphic mark left by the ritual occupation of this place — perhaps to be linked to a few remains of fireplaces and an accumulation of stones visible in a neighbouring shelter (**Fig. 25**) — this modest drawing bears witness to a last usage of the shelter during female initiations, long after the last “little red men” of the region had disappeared.



At the end of this report, we hope to have at least shown that one should distrust any “direct” reading of rock images and, after a last visit to “Christol Cave”, we take our leave of the site, but not without having a final look at the plain where, down below, a few cattle are still grazing (**Fig. 113**).

“Let us not tell the day the secrets of the night.”  
(Évariste de Parry, *Erotic poems*, 1779)

Fig. 113. Herd grazing below the site  
(Photo JLLQ, February 2004).

[402] Fig. 84, No. 80.

[403] Fig. 84, No. 79.

[404] Eastwood (2006 : 149-169; particularly the table p. 159).





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